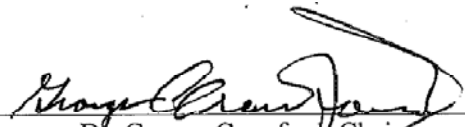


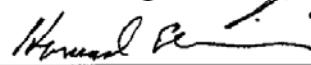
**CHANGES IN THE WAYS DECISIONS WERE MADE  
IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S  
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAM BETWEEN 2000 AND 2009**  
by

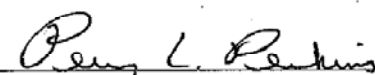
**Leigh Anne Taylor Knight**

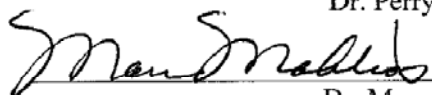
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A dissertation submitted to the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
and the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Kansas in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

  
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## ABSTRACT

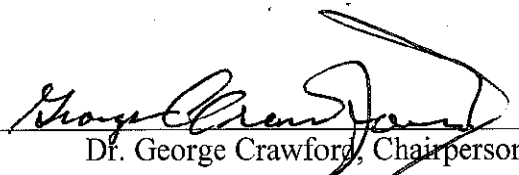
This research was designed to answer: *What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 1999 and 2009?* Through a qualitative study, attention was given to emergent concepts and relationships relevant to the phenomenon of collaborative decision making in the distributed leadership framework. With a six-question survey, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with participants (counselors and the superintendent) from an urban-suburban school district in the Midwestern part of the United States. Data from these interviews were validated with nontechnical literature, technical literature, and the personal and professional experiences of the researcher. Findings were that leadership structure and leadership personnel for the department coincided with changes in the interactions of participants resulting in changes in the structures, routines and tools used in decision making. Evidence also indicated an increase in collaborative development of tools used to collect and examine data, as well as an increase in the use of data to make decisions in the department in Professional Learning Communities.

Taylor Knight's Model of Distributed Leadership depicted the interactions of the guidance and counseling staff and district leadership over the 10-year period studied. The interactions perceived as contributing to the decisions with the most positive impact on the department were characterized as the participants' commitment to execute leadership through: building relationships; asking for and giving input and listening; starting with parameters then being flexible as the situations evolved; and determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions.

The Dissertation Committee for Leigh Anne Taylor Knight certifies  
that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

**CHANGES IN THE WAYS DECISIONS WERE MADE  
IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT'S  
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PROGRAM BETWEEN 2000 AND 2009**

Committee:



Dr. George Crawford, Chairperson

Dr. Howard Ebmeier  
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Monday, April 5, 2010

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The counselors who participated in this study and all those they represent as they are the model of distributed leadership

## **DEDICATIONS**

To the students we serve now and in the future:

- May the leaders of your schools learn the importance of listening to every voice;
- May the leaders of your schools engage you, your parents, and your community in making the decisions that will impact you; and
- May the leaders of your schools trust and empower your teachers, counselors and other staff to do what your community collaboratively believes to be best.

This work and its findings are dedicated to those who believe in improving the quality of life for others through relationships, collaborative decision making and learning. May your efforts bring out the best in each and every person and all situations.

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## CHAPTER ONE: STATEMENT OF THE QUESTION

### Introduction

With schools being called to meet unprecedented national goals of *all students* mastering rigorous content, learning how to learn and competing in a global society, collaborative leadership is critical to the success of public schools. “If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff “ (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37).

Public schools need systemic change to increase student achievement, and the involvement of all stakeholders is imperative. A collaborative approach in which everyone assumes responsibility for the daily decisions being made in the schoolhouse and in the classroom is necessary to change the way in which students experience learning. Such an approach requires the leader to be a learner in the collaborative community, rather than being a person who has all the answers on how to lead. Public school leaders need to rethink leadership to purposefully affect student achievement in this unprecedented time.

“There is no school for leaders that will teach them exactly how to make their district into one that will leave no child behind” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Therefore, it makes it all the more important that research assumes responsibility for documenting and recording the specific interactions of collaborative decision making cultures in results-oriented organizations as a way of informing professionals.

## **Context of the Problem**

The Midwestern school district, home to the guidance and counseling program studied, is both urban and suburban in its make-up, encompassing 82 square miles and 45,000 households. With thirty-one educational sites, the district serves more than 18,000 students enrolled from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. The district has faced rapidly changing demographic challenges with a growth of free and reduced lunch students from 10% in 1995 to 37% in 2009, alongside an increase in English Language Learners to 5% of the student population in just 10 years. These challenges have been faced under the leadership of one superintendent whose approach is grounded in collaborative leadership and shared decision making. The scope of this study of a 10-year period in a district's history is designed to examine how decisions being made have changed concurrent with his having been the organization's leader since 1995.

The researcher was a participant in the culture from 2000 to 2009. Her own career includes 20 years of experience in education, 10.5 of which were in the classroom with secondary students and 16 of which included leadership responsibilities. Working in three reputable Midwestern school districts, the researcher has experienced decision making in a variety of contexts and in roles as teacher, district coordinator, building principal and assistant superintendent. Along her career path, the phenomenon of collaborative decision making was experienced at different levels, depending on the events, culture, people and other forces either diminishing or strengthening and supporting it.

Seeking to describe the phenomenon and distill the factors that have affected the shared decision making culture of the district studied through a group of its participants is

critical. What can the stories of participants in such a culture reveal that will assist educational leaders, educators of future leaders, and education researchers in making effective decisions for meeting the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> Century students?

### **Purpose and Research Question**

This research is intended to answer:

*What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?*

With research oriented toward action and process, concepts and relationships will emerge. It will be determined whether they are relevant to the phenomenon of collaborative decision making in the distributed leadership framework. Relevant concepts and relationships will cluster into categories and attempts will be made to make sense of the categories. Eventually, a theoretical framework will evolve to explain the phenomena of how decisions were made and how they changed over the 10-year period. The sources for this researchable problem are from personal and professional experience, participant interviews, nontechnical literature and technical literature.

This study was conceived to describe the phenomenon of decision making over time as distilled from the experience of guidance counseling professionals who were or are still serving as educators in the studied school district. The goal of this study, based on the phenomenological data provided from interviews, is to define relevant concepts and relationships of decision making, identifying the interactions of leaders and followers in given situations and how tools, routines and structures are employed by educators in our 21st century.

### **Limitations**

This study focused exclusively on the K-12 guidance counselors of a Midwestern urban-suburban school district as a representative group of employee stakeholders in the decision making processes over a 10-year period and, in particular, on a group of seven of them who agreed to participate in this study. In addition, one leader who had been superintendent during the time period studied was interviewed.

The study was focused exclusively on their experiences during the 10-year period being studied, and many of their interviews led to comparing and contrasting experiences prior to and after the time period. While it was not the focus of the study to compare and contrast their experiences within the counseling and guidance department of the studied district with other experiences in or outside of the district's department, the interviewees made explanations of their experiences by describing such comparisons. The data were comprised of stories and explanations obtained through semi-structured face-to-face interviews.

### **Assumptions**

Given the guidance and counseling department's core principles were aligned with the shared decision making core value of the district and the researcher's history in the district during the 10-year period being studied, the study proceeded from the assumption that the participants were representative of educators in the district and across the nation who are employed in such systems. It was also assumed their varied and unique stories of decision making and participation in an educational system's culture would provide information about collaborative decision making and how to foster, support, and strengthen it in other situations and systems.

Common themes emerge in the literature about decision making in organizations, in particular educational environments. However, it is also true that highly unique and individualized circumstances contributed to the decision making experiences over time by the interviewees. Finally, this study sought to limit its focus specifically to how the participants, both the guidance counselors and the district leaders, define and describe decision making processes used as a lived and experienced phenomenon. It did not focus on other kinds of decision making engaged by educational cultures.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Strauss and Corbin (1990), technical literature serves to theoretically sensitize the researcher to conditions that influence the experiences being studied. By selecting the right literature in conjunction with performing the analysis, one can learn much about related concepts that influence the phenomenon. The point, however, of conducting grounded theory research is to “listen” to the data from one’s sample and use the technical literature as a point of checking it out against the real (primary) sources in one’s study. By connecting one’s experiences in the field with the reading of literature, the researcher is destined to build an integrated picture and enhance the conceptual richness of the theory.

There was a sizeable body of literature on leadership and decision making and a smaller set of research focused specifically on guidance and counseling. The literature, for purposes of this research, can be categorized into the following distinct areas of focus: (a) leadership influencing the learning environment; (b) collaborative leadership and decision making; (c) viewing decision making through the lens of distributed leadership; (d) structures for decision making; and (e) decision making applied in guidance and counseling.

### **Leadership Influencing the Learning Environment**

Widely recognized in the literature is the concept of school leaders exerting a powerful, if indirect, influence on teaching quality and student learning. In a review of literature for the American Educational Research Association, Leithwood and Riehl

(2003) determined that school leadership has significant effects on student learning, second only to the effects of the quality of curriculum and teachers' instruction. Through case studies of exceptional schools, Togneri and Anderson (2003) surmised school leaders influence learning to the greatest extent when they generate common effort around ambitious goals and ensure implementation of conditions supporting teachers and helping students succeed. While the impact of leadership appears to be mostly indirect, leaders who promote a vision and goals while guaranteeing the needed resources and processes are in place to enable teachers to teach well do influence student learning (Leithwood and Riehl, 2003). Promoting such a common vision and goals has been a cornerstone in what has been termed "collaborative leadership" in the past few decades.

Collaborative leadership is a phrase nearly commonplace in the circles of education professionals these days. Since synonyms for the word collaborative include joint, two-way, mutual and shared, one has to wonder how committed leaders such as superintendents, principals and district directors truly are to authentic collaborative leadership. What does it mean for a collaborative leader to empower an entire organization? How does such empowerment manifest itself throughout pockets of professionals in the district? How critical is such a leadership approach to positioning a school district to effectively meet the demands of public education in the 21st century?

### **Collaborative Leadership and Decision Making**

With schools being called to meet unprecedented national goals of *all students* mastering rigorous content, learning how to learn and competing in a global society, collaborative leadership is critical to the success of public schools. "If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on

building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff “ (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37).

Rethinking how leadership in decision making has occurred in the past offers a better path for sustained organizational improvement. Consider the following findings:

- Organizations with a passion for learning will have enduring influence (Covey, 1996).
- Enterprises must become learning and teaching institutions that build in continuous learning in jobs to dominate the 21st century (Drucker, 1992).
- The educational system must be an expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not just in reaction to the latest policy, but as a way of life (Fullan, 1993).
- “The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. xi).

### **Viewing Decision Making Through the Lens of Distributed Leadership**

Scholars have long argued for moving beyond studying only the top leadership of organizations in attempts to describe how decision making occurs (Barnard, 1938). To shift the focus from the “what” and “who” of leadership-structures to the “how” of school leadership, Hallinger and Heck (1996) called researchers to study the daily performance of leadership routines, functions and structures. The realization that improving schools requires shifts in the behavior of leaders in relationship to the actions of others has prompted new theories of school leadership. Most recently, distributed leadership has attracted the attention of practitioners and scholars alike. An increasing emphasis is

being placed on the complex idea of distributed leadership, as decision making is shared by multiple individuals at different levels of the organization (Riordan, 2003). It sets the stage to discuss the interactions of leaders and followers in situational contexts.

As some interchangeably use the term distributed leadership with “shared leadership,” “team leadership,” and “democratic leadership,” there is a notion that it simply indicates school leadership involving multiple leaders; others promote it as reflecting an organizational quality rather than an individual attribute (Spillane, 2005). Similar to others (Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson and Diamond, 2001) this research will use distributed leadership as a conceptual framework for the practice of school leadership and decision making. Distributive leadership serves the purpose of expanding expertise across staff members, thereby deepening efforts for improvement (Supovitz and Poglinco, 2001). “Leadership practice centers not only on what people do, but how and why they do it. Understanding leadership practice is imperative if research is to generate usable knowledge about and for school leadership” (Spillane, 2005, p. 1).

In fact, Spillane, Diamond and Jita (2003) argue the need for the distributive leadership approach to decision making research:

It is essential to go beyond a consideration of the roles, strategies, and traits of those individuals who occupy formal leadership positions to consider how the practice of leadership is stretched over leaders, followers, and the material and symbolic artifacts in the situation. The situation of leaders' practice - material artifacts, tools, etc. - is not simply an appendage, but rather a defining element of that practice. Leadership practice emerges in and through the interaction of leaders, followers, and situation in the execution of leadership tasks. (p. 9)

Others also state the importance of using the distributed leadership framework for advancing the literature. For example, Knapp et al. (2003) as the result of a

comprehensive analysis of principal and superintendent leadership conclude school leadership can improve powerful and equitable student learning by:

- creating a focus on learning;
- establishing professional communities that value learning;
- involving external environments connected to the learning;
- acting strategically and sharing leadership; and
- building coherence.

Richard Elmore (2000), a professor of educational leadership at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, argues instruction can improve only if school leadership is substantially redefined and changed to include the notion of distributive leadership.

Further clarifying this position on distributed leadership and decision making, Spillane (2005) states:

Leaders typically have interaction with others. They also have interaction with aspects of the situation including a variety of tools, routines, and structures. Tools include everything from student assessment data to protocols for evaluating teachers.

Structures include routines such as grade-level meetings and the scheduling of teachers' prep periods. From a distributed perspective, these routines, tools, and structures define leadership practice; the situation both enables and constrains leadership practice.

Aspects of the situation define and are defined by leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers. Structures, routines, and tools are the means through which people act. (p. 5)

### **Structures for Decision Making**

Darling-Hammond (1996), along with many other researchers in education and other arenas, has identified the importance of personnel working in teams for affecting

decision making and ultimately improving schools. Creating and sustaining such collaborative cultures call school leaders to ensure structures exists. These structures must engage every staff member on a team with the purpose of working together on substantive issues for the school.

Collaborative teams can be built in a number of ways. Some schools tend to organize teachers by content area or grade level while others implement a team concept on the basis of shared students. Task force teams meant to tackle particular school goals or initiatives can be as effective as implementing teams based on professional development areas of study. There is no magical formula for how the teams are formed as the effectiveness is tied to the group being together for a clear and meaningful purpose.

In addition to ensuring teams are in place, a leader must create an environment in which the collaborative processes will influence the learning of the organization.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) identify four prerequisites for effective collaborative teaming:

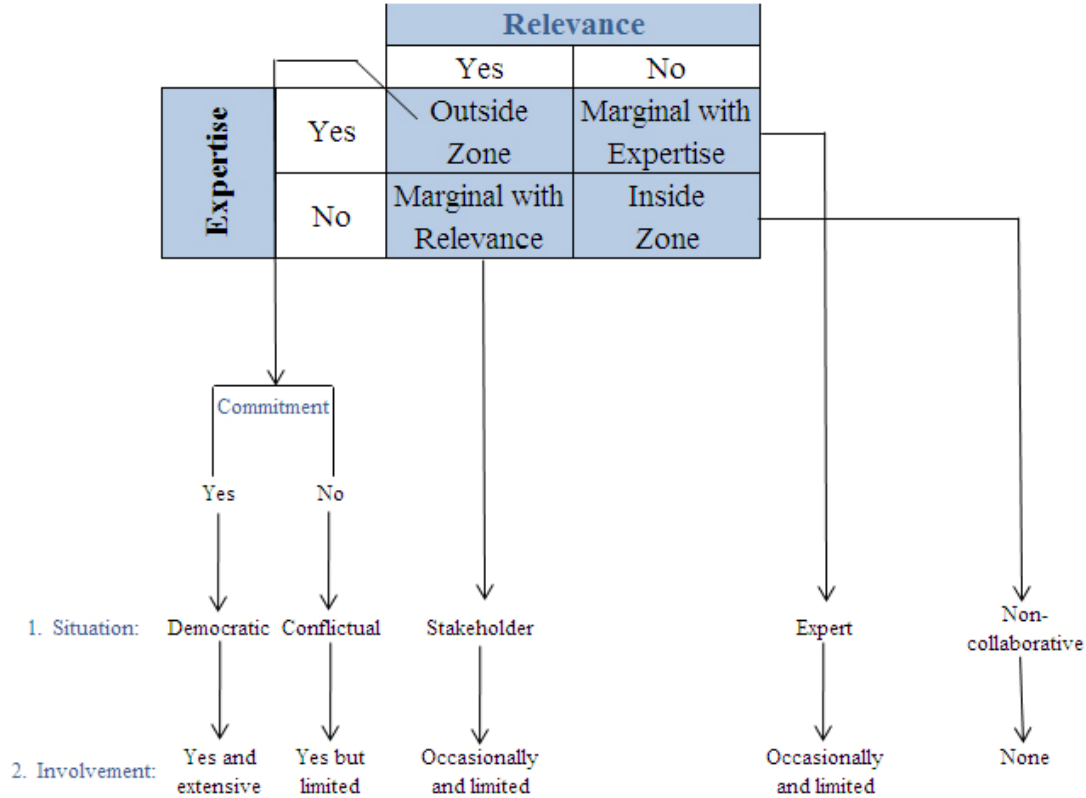
1. There must be time built into the school day and year for collaboration.
2. It must be explicit what the purpose of the collaboration will be.
3. Training and support on effective collaboration is needed by school personnel.
4. Teachers, principals and other school personnel must accept the responsibility to work together as true professional colleagues.

Once teams and these prerequisites are in place, an organization is ready to enhance the learning of all.

“Sustaining an improvement initiative, therefore, requires much more than congeniality. It requires the common goals, collective efforts, and shared insights of people deeply engaged in the analysis of their current practice and behavior” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 128). Therefore, the work of the collaborative teams in professional development must be job-embedded. The learning conversations must happen in the school environment in which the teachers teach. The educators must share their student data and discuss their daily practices in the classroom and school with one another. From this, they must identify what learning they need to experience to positively impact their work with students. The structure of these professional learning communities establishing routines such as reviewing data and practice along with improving the tools used to do their work displays all the attributes of distributed leadership.

In an attempt to assist leaders with identifying the amount of subordinate involvement in different decision situations, Hoy and Tarter (1995) have proposed the model presented in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Decision Situation and Subordinate Involvement**



In an effort to define the four decision making situations of their model, Hoy and Tarter (1995) suggest identifying the subordinates' levels of:

1. Expertise needed to make useful contributions to the decision and
2. Personal stake in the decision outcomes as a test of relevance.

They continue by acknowledging one's level of commitment to the overall interest of the organization should be gauged in an effort to discern if one's personal goals compete or conflict with those of the organization. To test the level of commitment, an administrator can ask, "Are the followers committed to the mission of the organization and can they be trusted to make decisions in the best interests of the organization?"



After determining the type of decision situation as well as the expertise, relevance and commitment of the participants, an administrator must determine the structure. Hoy and Tarter (1995) suggest five decision making structures, as described in the purest form:

1. Group consensus: All leaders and followers participate in the decision making, sharing equally as ideas are generated and evaluated. Total consensus must be achieved to arrive at the decision.
2. Group majority: All leaders and followers participate in the decision making and the decision is made by majority rule.
3. Group advisory: The opinions of all followers are solicited by the leader(s) and the group discusses the implications of all suggestions made. The leader(s) make the decision and it may or may not reflect the opinions of the followers.
4. Individual advisory: After identifying followers who have expertise to inform the decision, the leader(s) consult with them individually. The leader(s) then make the decision that may or may not reflect the opinions of those consulted.
5. Unilateral decision: The leader(s) make the decision without having the participation of the followers in the process.

As depicted in their model, a leader can follow a simple flowchart to identify the best approach for decision making in the given situation.

## **Decision Making Applied in Guidance and Counseling**

In 2006, a report titled *What School Counselors Do to Affect College Preparation and Application Rates of Low Income Students in High Schools That Are Nationally Recognized for High Performance* was published as a result of research commissioned by the College Board from the National Center for School Counseling Outcome Research. The critical roles school counselors play in inspiring youth and helping them gain college entrance, in spite of social, economic and cultural challenges faced, is directly aligned with the counselors being leaders in providing rigorous academic selections, especially for underrepresented students.

The College Board (2008) identifies 10 strategies used by counselors and administrators in the schools they label as both inspirational and innovative. The practices in these schools fit well into 10 broadly themed characteristics and strategies. While not all 10 are found in any one school, each of the schools exhibits several of them. The effective activities are:

1. Practicing Effective Program Management
2. Establishing an Achievement-Oriented School Climate
3. Providing Academic and Financial Outreach Programs for Parents
4. Offering College-Focused Interventions for Low-Income Students
5. Partnering with Colleges and the Community
6. Sharing School Leadership
7. Providing Systemic, Multilevel Counseling Interventions
8. Using Data to Support Student Achievement
9. Contributing to the Development of School Policies and Practices

## 10. Helping Counselors to Counsel

The sixth strategy, *sharing school leadership*, is important across each school as counselors consistently report feeling more effective when they routinely function as members of the school community and participate in the school's decision making efforts. Teamwork and collaboration, according to The College Board (2008), are cornerstones in the effective management of school counseling programs succeeding in spite of the odds being stacked against the students served. To create change and sustain school environments that support and engage all students, one cannot expect the sole responsibility to fall on the shoulders of school counselors. "Change requires marshalling forces from across the school organization" (The College Board, 2008, p.7) and this means district and building leaders must collaboratively engage a variety of voices in the processes to affect such change.

### **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter focuses on the qualitative methodology used for this research project. Specifically, it includes: (a) purpose and research question, (b) design of the study, (c) data sources, (d) interview process, and (e) data collection procedures. Finally, the particular methodology of phenomenological research is discussed and a specific procedural component of phenomenological research called “bracketing” is included.

#### **Purpose and Research Question**

This research is intended to answer:

*What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district’s guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?*

With this research being oriented toward action and process, fuel was given to the intention that identifiable concepts and relationships would emerge. The orientation toward action and process also supported determinations being made as to whether or not emergent concepts and relationships are relevant or irrelevant to the phenomenon of collaborative decision making in the distributed leadership framework. Relevant concepts and relationships should cluster into categories and attempts would ensue to make sense of the categories in new, rather than standard ways. Eventually, a theoretical framework would be developed to explain the phenomena of how decisions were being made and how this process changed over the 10-year period. The sources for this researchable problem are from personal and professional experience, participant interviews, nontechnical literature and technical literature.

This study was intended to describe the phenomenon of decision making over time as distilled from the experience of guidance counseling professionals who were or are still serving as educators in the school district studied. The goal of this study, based on the phenomenological data provided from interviews, was to define relevant concepts and relationships of decision making, identifying the interactions of leaders and followers in given situations and how tools, routines and structures employed by educators during the years spanned by the study evolved.

### **Design of the Study**

Given the phenomenological nature of the study, it was appropriate that the researcher conduct semi-structured, face-to-face interviews to compile and analyze career stories and to describe the phenomenon of decision making processes within the district. An initial contact with members of that group was made by telephone to request participation. Those who agreed to participate were asked to read and sign the informed consent form and to schedule a face-to-face interview.

After the data were collected and compiled, narrative accounts of each participant's career story were written. Pseudonyms were used and identifying details generalized to protect the identity of research subjects. Those narratives (stories) were returned to the respondents for their review to ensure accuracy and to solicit their feedback. Once finalized, the individual stories were distilled for themes, key quotations, and coded to describe the essential phenomenon of decision making.

## **Data Sources**

From the original research question, direction was found for the sampling and coding of data. The three broad categories of consideration for data collection were: 1. site where events occurred, 2. documents related to the work, and 3. informants to interview.

### ***Background of the District Site Providing Context for this Study***

The Midwestern school district, home to the guidance and counseling program studied, was both urban and suburban in its makeup, encompassing 82 square miles and 45,000 households. With 31 educational sites, the district served more than 18,000 students enrolled from pre-kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Of the total student population, approximately 30% were students of color. The district had a large number of families for whom English was a second language, with a total of nearly 900 students in the English Language Learners program. In addition, the district served nearly 10,000 other learners from preschool to senior citizens through Community Education.

The district had faced rapidly changing demographic challenges. The number of students in the district living in poverty increased from 10% in 1995 to 37% in 2009. In some areas of the district, the poverty rate had more than quadrupled. Fourteen elementary schools had more than 40% of their students receiving free lunches. In addition, the number of English Language Learners was increasing, but across the district there was wide variance in the ethnic background and economic status of students. Some students lived in homes filled with computers and the latest technological innovations; others came to school homeless (about 1.5% and increasing), or speaking a language

other than English (about 5%). The district was challenged with meeting the needs of a continually changing and diverse student body.

The district had demonstrated a long-standing commitment to providing students a solid education. The vision statement of *learners achieving excellence, embracing change and forging new traditions* stated the district's commitment to all learners, adults and students alike, and set the stage for an environment in which risk-taking was celebrated. The core values were the foundation of the collaborative leadership approach that was a hallmark of the tenure of the superintendent serving from 1995 - 2009: *high expectations, shared decision making, relationships and respect for diversity*. These statements meant to guide practice and human interactions were adopted through a collaborative process in which employees, students, parents and other community stakeholders gave input and feedback. In this, one of his first acts as the primary district leader, the superintendent set into motion the building of a culture that grew and developed for a decade into one of collaborative decision making. The scope of this study over a 10-year period is intended to examine how decisions being made have changed in conjunction with his having been the organization's leader since 1995.

### ***Documents Reviewed***

Valuable to this process was nontechnical literature, as termed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). For purposes of this study, the following sources existed: Comprehensive Needs Survey data for the district spanning a 10-year period; District Inventory of Guidance Services by Counselor and School; Time and Task Analysis Study

for three-year period; and meeting agendas and minutes from Counseling Advisory Board, Steering Committee and Professional Learning Communities (PLC) Cadre.

These primary documents were important sources of data meant to supplement interviews with people from the organization. They were reviewed and their contents organized into thematic representations of the processes used to make decisions about guidance and counseling programming for the district.

### ***Informants Interviewed***

As this is a study of changes in how decisions were made for the guidance and counseling department, it was essential to the work to verify this by discussing situations and experiences with participants in the culture. In addition to interviewing five current counselors in district schools, the process included interviews with two counselors who worked previously in the district (one retired and one resigned after having been a counselor and then a principal). The process also led to interviewing the superintendent himself (who had just retired) as a way to verify and validate the patterns emerging from the work. Table 1 presents summary information about the eight participants in this study.



**Table 1: Study Participants in the Order of Interviews**

Participant	Current Location	2000 Position	2009 Position	Other Background
Will	High School	Not yet employed by district	HS Counselor	White Male, Former Teacher in district
Nora	High School	Not yet employed by district	HS Counselor	African American Female, Former Middle School Counselor in district and in out-of-state district previously
David	Elementary	Elementary Counselor	Elementary Counselor	White Male, Former Teacher in another district
Vonda	Elementary	Elementary Counselor	Elementary Counselor	White Female, Former Instructional Aide and Teacher in district
Cherie	Middle School	High School Counselor	Middle School Counselor	White Female, Former Elementary Teacher, Elementary Counselor and High School Counselor in district
Brenda	Resigned to be with Family	Elementary Teacher	None with the district	White Female, Former Teacher, Elementary Counselor and Elementary Principal in district
Linda	Retired	Elementary Counselor	None with the district	White Female, Former Teacher in district
Superintendent Richard	Retired	Superintendent	Superintendent	White Male, Former Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent in district with career experiences in another state as teacher, building principal and district administrator

### **Interview Process**

The interview process was a six-question, semi-structured interview that was administered individually in a face-to-face meeting with each counselor or former counselor (included in Appendix A). Because of the nature of phenomenological research, a goal of the structure of these interviews was to allow a conversational tone intended to elicit deep reflection and yield rich data from the subjects. Keep in mind that the researcher and subjects shared in common the experience of working together in the district culture. For six years of the 10-year period studied, the researcher worked

directly with the guidance and counseling department in a district leader support role. The relationships developed during that time led to the research conversations being open, honest and authentic.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The following steps were taken to collect data:

1. Current and former guidance and counseling staff, along with the retired superintendent of the district, were located and contacted to request their participation in the study.
2. Once each person agreed to participate, an individual face-to-face interview was scheduled and the informed consent form was shared for review and signed by the subject. This informed consent form is included in Appendix B.
3. The participants were interviewed by the researcher in a face-to-face meeting to compile their career stories and learn about their experience of decision making within the district in the given 10-year period.
4. The data from each subject were compiled and the opportunity was provided to each subject to review in order to ensure accuracy and gain feedback.
5. Once all the interview data were compiled and finalized, they were analyzed and coded for themes and key quotations in order to describe the essential phenomenon of decision making within the district's guidance and counseling department over the 10-year period.
6. The interview data were also cross-referenced with the district documents reviewed. The process involved checking dates, reviewing content of minutes from meetings and

reviewing data gathered on the guidance and counseling department to check the accuracy of statements made during the interviews.

In more specific detail, the researcher sought participants who were representative of the guidance and counseling staff in the district between 2000 and 2009. A total of five current counselors, two former counselors and the retired superintendent responded to contact and agreed to participate. They were asked to provide informed consent and then each scheduled a face-to-face interview at his or her convenience. In all cases the interviews took place within four weeks after initial contact. Interviews were completed in the months of July 2009, August 2009 and September 2009.

Interviews were conducted either in the researcher's office, the participant's office, or the participant's home. Participants individually selected the location, based on their availability and comfort. Interviews ranged in duration from just over 26 minutes up to one hour and 21 minutes.

The interviews were audio recorded with a digital voice recorder and saved as individual digital audio (.wav) files. To transcribe the interviews, each interview was played over and the researcher transcribed the recording. Each interview was played over a third time or more so that the transcriptions could be edited for accuracy by the researcher. Once compiled, the interviews yielded a total of more than six hours (6:11) of audio recording, and the transcriptions comprised a total of 46 pages of single-spaced written material.

At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to receive a copy of the completed transcripts of their interviews to check them for accuracy and

meaning. However, none of the interviewees requested to review the transcripts. One participant also volunteered to share a full set of files of guidance and counseling documents from 1983 - 2009. These were used to augment the already collected documents for review from district files of 1997 – 2009.

The researcher kept handwritten notes on an interview guide during each interview. The transcription process described above involved at least two additional listening reviews of each interview, and in some cases additional notes were recorded on the interview guides. Once completely transcribed, the interview data were reviewed and re-read to code the data for themes and key concepts.

In the data reported here, the names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities. Furthermore, their locations have been generalized to the level of school in which they work. The interviews were transcribed with “you” as the primary way in which informants referenced the researcher when answering the questions. In addition, another person who held a district position of leadership with the guidance and counseling department during the studied years was referenced. For purposes of this study, he was given the pseudonym of “Shawn.”

### **Phenomenological Research and Analysis**

This study was conducted within the framework of phenomenological research. As concepts are the basis of analysis in grounded theory research, all procedures for sampling and coding are directed toward identifying, developing and relating these concepts. Strauss and Corbin (1990) used the term *proven theoretical relevance* when describing how certain concepts are labeled as significant. To make this call, the

concepts must be *repeatedly present* or *notably absent* when the researcher is comparing situation after situation. Secondly, the coding procedures earn certain concepts the status of *categories*. These *categories* are what one uses as the foundation in describing the relationships existing in the studied phenomenon.

Phenomenology, both a qualitative and constructivist method, relies on information gleaned from those who have experienced and lived the phenomenon. In fact, as Sadala and Adorno (2002) suggested, “there is a phenomenon only when there is a subject who experiences the phenomenon” (p. 283). With this research’s goal of answering *What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district’s guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?*, the phenomenon being studied is from the perspective of a specific district’s professionals. As Donalek (2004) described phenomenological research, “the goal is the exhaustive, essential description of the phenomenon under study. More than anything else, the description must allow the reader to grasp what is central to the phenomenon” (pp. 516-517).

As in the case of this research, in-depth interviews are the main method for collecting data in phenomenological research (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). With there being variations in the ways in which grounded theory research, including the interviewing process, is performed (Donalek, 2004; Sadala & Adorno, 2002; Wimpenny & Gass, 2000), a key component of phenomenological research is “bracketing” (Hatch, 2002). Bracketing is the process of securing the researcher’s personal experience and perspective in relation to the phenomenon is recognized and “bracketed” as one interprets and analyzes the phenomenon as lived and experienced by others.

The relationship between researcher and participant shifts from being observational in quantitative research, to dialogical in qualitative research, and then to reflective in phenomenological research (Wimpenny and Gass, 2000). This reflectivity appears to recognize the researcher as an important element in the research process. As the interviews were conducted and throughout the process of analyzing the interview data, the researcher remained cognizant of the experiential framework from which the participants' stories were heard, recorded, and interpreted to make meaning of the phenomenon of decision making. In some cases, participants asked questions of the researcher, engaging in real dialogue about how both the interviewer and interviewee came to conceptualize the phenomenon based on both common and different experiences.

### **Bracketing: The Researcher's Story of Personal and Professional Experience**

To validate and lend perspective to the results discussed later, it is important to acknowledge the researcher's background. Being curious and concerned about the world in which I work and believing in taking risks to make it better for the students of the future, the study of the relationships in collaborative cultures to improve education comes naturally. Having had professional experiences in three public school districts ranging in size from 10,000 to more than 18,000 students and formal schooling grounded in current literature on leadership, my ability to recognize tenets of collaborative decision making have been honed over two decades. The same experiences have led to my asking questions about how relationships are developed and sustained in collaborative cultures and why participants act the way they do in a variety of situations occurring in schools.

In addition, I am fascinated by the rate at which the world is changing and the amount of information and new technologies emerging. I constantly have ideas about

how to lead colleagues through such times. I want to serve and support them while holding them accountable for doing all we can to maximize the potential of each student we serve. I believe public education is the foundation of our country's democracy and can serve as the cornerstone of individuals' successes in the global economy. Therefore, I am called to inform other educators as to how we can provide collaborative decision making efforts that truly empower the professionals with whom we work to differentiate the system to meet the needs of our students. As American schools were never designed to teach all students the new skills required for work, learning and active citizenship in the current knowledge economy, there is a need to create a system that can educate all students for success in the 21st century. I believe it will be by way of collaborative decision making that this will happen.

Specifically, I have had experience with the building of professional learning communities among educators and have spent nearly a decade in a leadership role with school counselors. In 2000, I joined the studied district as a high school assistant principal with the responsibility of guiding the efforts of student services through the guidance and counseling department. Three years later, I assumed a district-level position and began working directly with the K-12 guidance and counseling program across more than 30 sites serving students. My primary responsibilities for six years in this capacity included recruiting and assisting in the hiring process of counselors and providing support and leadership for the professional development of counselors and the enhancement of the guidance and counseling program. In this unique role, I had responsibility for stimulating the vision of how updating our implementation of the state's Model Guidance Program could enhance district services to students and families.

However, the direct supervision and evaluation of all counselors were the responsibilities of the site principals. Being in such a position, I developed strong, authentic relationships with the counselors and became an advocate for their work with others. The trust emerging from these relationships enabled me to have honest and open interviews with the participants in this study, thus leading to the “real stories” being shared.

As the demands of the 21st century call schools to think differently about the way we serve students, one group on the forefront of that work are those expected to connect students to opportunities through guidance curriculum and individual planning. In addition, the demands on school counselors for providing responsive services to students has multiplied over my years of experience in a district with changing student demographics similar to others across the nation. With students arriving at school with more differences in the resources they bring to bear both from a financial and human capital standpoint, counselors are on the front line of providing support in the system for serving the needs of these students and preparing them to learn. Therefore, I am interested in examining collaborative decision making through the lens of school guidance and counseling in the district in which I have had my most recent experiences with this phenomenon.



## **CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

### **Introduction**

This research was designed to answer:

*What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?*

With research oriented toward action and process, concepts and relationships emerged from the participant interviews and nontechnical literature. Cross-referencing the data with the technical literature, as well as exploring it through the researcher's bracketed personal experiences, lead to identification of a time line of decision making events and categories of participant interactions. This chapter is divided into the following major sections: (a) research participants' profiles; (b) time line of decision making events identified; (c) structures, routines and tools identified in decision making; (d) interactions described in decision making; (e) situational needs for decision making in 2009; and (f) conclusion.

### **Research Participants' Profiles**

The eight informants in this study came from all levels of public education. Five were still serving as counselors in the K-12 district studied; one had also been a principal and then resigned to stay home with her family; and two had retired from the district. The profiles appear in the order in which the participants were interviewed. The profiles include the career backgrounds of the participants. The references made to structures, routines and tools are documented in a time line of decision making events and explored

as a part of the holistic approach to decision making in distributed leadership.

Informants' descriptions of the interactions of the leaders and followers in the decision making process over the 10 years studied are summarized.

### ***Will***

Will's career began as a teacher of career education at the high school where he continued to serve as the department chair of guidance and counseling. After three full years as a teacher and coach, he left the teaching position to be a full-time graduate student completing his master's degree and certification in guidance and counseling. In his fifth year as a counselor in the high school, he has had experience as both a member of the site's leadership team and the district's collaborative teacher-administrator negotiations team. He has also been very active in state and local professional organizations.

### ***Nora***

Taking a nontraditional path to becoming a counselor, Nora earned her bachelor's degree in history and worked in the audio recording business. Then completing a master's in school counseling, she attained certification as a counselor on the east coast. She began working as a middle school counselor in an urban district in an eastern state, completing the first two years in the education profession. Relocating to the Midwest, Nora assumed the role of middle school counselor in the district of study. After two years, she transferred to the high school and within one year was named the counseling chair of the department. She was serving in her fifth year at the high school, and had been a district staff development cadre leader with guidance and counseling for six years.

### ***David***

Beginning his career as a fourth grade teacher, David served for the first five years in a district just outside the metropolitan area that was home to the studied district. In 1983, David was one of the first counselors hired as the studied district established a comprehensive guidance and counseling program in its elementary schools. For the next 10 years, David served in five different elementary schools as a counselor, traveling to different sites throughout the week. For the past 16 years, David served as a full-time counselor at one elementary school. He served over a decade as the peer facilitator of monthly elementary guidance and counseling meetings.

### ***Vonda***

Vonda accelerated through the educational career ranks by securing a job in the studied district first as an instructional aide serving students with special needs. She finished that first year as a long-term teacher substitute in the school, and was transferred to teach fifth grade in the same elementary for the remaining three and one half years. In mid-year again, Vonda was promoted to the elementary counselor position in the elementary school where she was still serving at the time of this study. With 20 years in education and the majority of those as an elementary counselor, Vonda has been active in local professional organizations.

### ***Cherie***

Cherie arrived to teach third grade in the studied district after having had elementary teaching experience in two other Midwestern districts. After six years with the district, she transitioned to teaching pre-school so she could be at home better hours with her then young sons. Returning to the district in 1987, Cherie served five different

elementary schools as a traveling counselor for eight years. She then experienced high school counseling for two years and transitioned to middle school counseling when a new site was opened in 1999. Still serving as a middle school counselor, Cherie was well-equipped to share not only about the studied 10 years of guidance and counseling in the district, but also about the historical context before 1999.

### ***Brenda***

Serving as a primary teacher for four years in the studied district launched Brenda's career and interest in becoming an elementary counselor and eventually an elementary principal. While an elementary counselor for three years, she served as the district's first counseling and guidance staff development cadre leader. She progressed professionally to serve two years as an elementary principal before making the personal decision to begin a family and stay home with them while she had young children.

### ***Linda***

Linda's career began in the studied district as a teacher of students with special needs for seven years in an elementary school. As one of the first counselors named when the district began its comprehensive elementary guidance and counseling program, Linda served four years as a traveling counselor between two elementary sites. As the program evolved, she landed at one elementary where she served as the counselor for 21 years. Retiring in 2008, she left the district after having been a leader among her peers in developing guidance curriculum and other counseling program elements.

### ***Superintendent Richard***

A lifetime as a Midwesterner and an educational career spanning 49 years in the K-12 ranks are the cornerstones to the retired superintendent of the studied district. After serving 15 years as a high school teacher and coach in a variety of school districts, Richard advanced through the educational leadership ranks as an assistant high school principal, a middle school principal and directorships of middle schools and secondary instruction. Arriving at the studied district in 1985 and hired as the assistant superintendent of school supervision and instruction, Richard began establishing the foundation for what would eventually be the core values of the district he would lead as superintendent for 14 years. Retired by the time of this study, Richard's recollection of events for purposes of this study serve to frame contextually the work and situations encountered by the guidance and counseling department as decisions were made.

### ***Other Referenced Individuals***

In 2000, I joined the studied district as a high school assistant principal with the responsibility of guiding the efforts of student services at our high school site through the guidance and counseling department. Three years later, I assumed a district-level position and began working directly with the K-12 guidance and counseling program across 31 sites serving students. My primary responsibilities for six years in this capacity included recruiting and assisting in the hiring process of counselors and providing support and leadership for the professional development of counselors and the enhancement of the guidance and counseling program. In this unique role, I had responsibility for stimulating the vision of how updating our implementation of the state's Model Guidance Program could enhance district services to students and families.

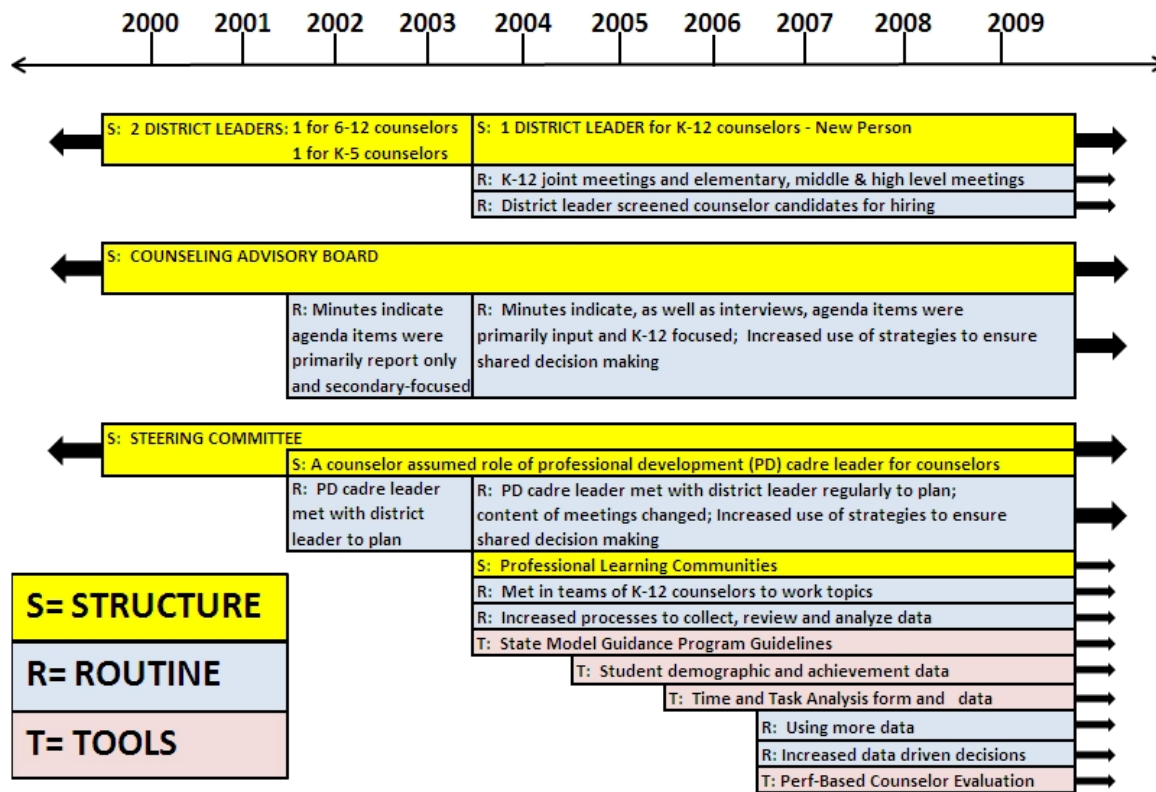
However, the direct supervision and evaluation of all counselors were the responsibilities of the site principals. Being in such a position, I developed strong, authentic relationships with the counselors. The trust emerging from these relationships enabled me to have honest and open interviews with the informants in this study, and the references to “you” are references to me as the leader in six of the years studied. At the time the interviews were conducted, I was no longer working in the capacity of the district’s K-12 guidance and counseling program leader.

Immediately prior to my leadership, the guidance and counseling program had a leader who worked with the elementary counselors and another leader, referenced as “Shawn” in this study, who worked primarily with the high school counselors and had some responsibility for the staff development of all secondary counselors.

### **Time line of Decision Making Events Identified**

Interviews of the informants and review of nontechnical literature resulted in the development of a time line of decision making events in the guidance and counseling department between the school year beginning 1999-2000 to the school year ending 2008-2009. For purposes of the study, each school year was referenced as the latter year of the school calendar (i.e., the school year that began in August 1999 and ended in May 2000 was referenced as 2000). Figure 2 is the visual representation of the time line of events built on the data collected.

**Figure 2: Time line of Decision Making Events 2000-2009**



### Structures, Routines and Tools Identified in Decision Making

As a part of these decision making events, the participants (leaders and followers) had interaction with one another, as well as interaction with aspects of the situation including a variety of structures, routines and tools. Aspects of the situations defined and were defined by the interactions participants had. From a distributed perspective, the structures, routines and tools were the means through which people acted, creating and remaking them through the leadership practice.

All eight participants interviewed referenced the structures of district leadership, Steering Committee and Advisory Board when asked to recall the processes used in

making decisions. When asked *how did decisions made last year differ procedurally from decisions made in the previous 10 years*, participants consistently provided answers similar to David's.

For the last five years, there has been more structure than in the past; regular meetings, regular input, and more accountability. Previously it was more top-down, as far as affecting outcomes. That is the main contrast for the last five years and before that. For a long time, we didn't have Steering and Advisory meetings. It was a time when they were almost, just on paper and not meeting regularly. Actual decision making was not going on. So, it was refreshing to have and take part in and have some influence in what was going on in the program.

District documents (Board of Education minutes and agendas) indicate the existence of the Counseling Advisory Board prior to the 1980s. Consisting of school personnel and community members, its expressed purpose was "... acts as a liaison between the school and community, and it should provide recommendations concerning the needs of students and the community." (See Appendix C for details.) Beginning in 1996, another structure named the Steering Committee was formed as a group of representative counselors from the elementary, middle school and high school levels to provide input on the professional development needed by K-12 counselors to improve the programming to students.

All agendas and minutes of the Counseling Advisory Board were reviewed from 2002 – 2009. There were no such records for the Counseling Advisory Board available for years prior to 2002, which aligned with David's observation that "For a long time, we didn't have Steering and Advisory meetings. It was a time when they were almost, just on paper and not meeting regularly." When tallied, the topics for "report only" decreased from 11 in 2002 to three in 2009. The inverse was the case with the items for "input" on



decisions as those increased from one to 12, with a high of 14 items in 2007, over the same time period. (See Table 2.)

**Table 2: Tally of Advisory Board Items 2000-2009**

Advisory Board Items	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Elementary Report Only	No Agendas or Minutes of Counseling Advisory Board prior to 2002		0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary Report Only			11	7	2	0	2	2	1	2
K-12 Report Only			0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1
Elementary Topic for Input			0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Secondary Topic for Input			1	0	0	0	0	1	2	1
K-12 Topic for Input			0	1	5	8	8	13	9	11

Another pattern in the data from Counseling Advisory Board agendas and minutes was the shift from a secondary focus to a K-12 perspective. In 2002, all 11 “report only” items and one item for “input” were for middle and/or high school levels. By 2004, there were two secondary and one K-12 “report only” items with five K-12 “input” topics. Between 2005 and 2009, there were never fewer than eight K-12 “input” items and no more than two secondary focus items for “report only” or “input.”

Brenda gave the history of the Steering Committee and Advisory Board in her explanation of the changes that occurred from 2000 to 2009.

Some of the things that we did stayed the same, but were taken to a different level—the Steering Committee, as well as the Counseling Advisory Board. Steering Committee was the counselors who came together and decided the direction of the counseling program within the district’s framework. And then the Advisory Board was not only the counselors but it was also when we brought in the constituents from the community as well as the kids and those types of people. So those things remained the same, but again in my experience with those two things I felt like we started a framework with Shawn. And then when you came into the district, those two committees were taken to a higher level in terms of the discussions and the actual work that was being done in those. It didn’t feel like we were counselors who were over here. Rather, we were counselors who were a valuable part of the academic process, in terms of the discussion and such as it

related to the education of the whole student. So those two processes, while they remained the same, they grew in importance.

She aligned the changes over time with a personnel change in district leadership for the K-12 Counseling and Guidance program. David described the same 2004 change in leadership as “the biggest change” he recalled in all 26 years of his career as a counselor in the district.

Biggest change was when you came, basically looking at what the state said we had to do. How do we look good for the (state’s school accreditation process) and what was best for students? How could programs be helpful and what data did we need in our notebooks to know this? When you came, that kind of change happened. Counselors were the empowered people to do that and it made a big difference. The Steering Committee had the reason why we have this group, and we could make sure we were doing that and doing it the best we could, not just because we had to do it. You can stay in compliance but not have it be good for all students and the school, so we had to change.

In addition to the changes in meeting routines of the Counseling Advisory Board and Steering Committee corresponding with a change in district leadership for the Guidance and Counseling program, there was reference by six participants and in supporting written documents of another change in the structure for supervision and leadership. When I was named as the new district leader, the elementary counselors and secondary counselors were assigned to the leadership of one person rather than being with different district leadership. According to Superintendent Richard, the decision to pull the K-12 program under one leader was made in an important context.

The decision for purposeful alignment and study came with realignment of the organization. That decision grew out of a great deal of concern from Board of Education members’ perceptions. There were inferences from some community and parents about guidance and counseling services. It was critical at that time that we address those concerns using good process. That meant working very

closely with not only the counselors, but you had an Advisory Committee that fed into those processes and those discussions.

As he spoke of the previous structure, he also gave a history that spanned beyond the 10 years studied.

From the 30,000-foot view, counselors had been supervised directly and organized at the individual schools more than from district perspective. For the most part, it was a school-directed program. And I think that the major difference was we began to draw that together in terms of some type of systemic process around what were the critical pieces and how should we address those systemically rather than cottage industry. For me, that was a major change.

This change in leadership of 2004 changed another routine, the hiring process for K-12 counselors. As I became responsible for the direction of the program as the new leader, it was determined I would screen all counselor candidates after the Human Resources screening and before they interviewed with the building principal. Written records of the counseling interview questions contained specific questions about the state's Model Guidance Program and the ways a school counselor could impact a school's academic goals, such as meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, were asked of candidates.

With the new combined structure of elementary and secondary counselors directed by one leader, the routines related to meetings and professional development changed. Brenda who served as the professional development cadre leader for counselors recalled.

The other processes, certainly the position I held as staff development person in working with Shawn and in working with you. I felt like the collaborative discussions we would have in terms of even what was going on in the staff development department and how it related to counselors helped move our department efforts forward in a positive way.

Processes stayed the same where we would meet and we would talk about what I was gaining from this meeting that I had (with staff development) and we were talking about what you were gleaning from meetings that you had (with leadership). And then we would have brainstorming sessions about how we could take those back to the counselors and how the counselors could then benefit from the information that we were getting from the various departments in the district.

As a participating counselor, David recognized the changes in the routines of meetings and professional development gatherings, too.

Then, you came and we got to be in charge of our own meetings, which made a big difference. Before that we were basically told this is what our meetings are going to be about. And sometimes they had connections with guidance and counseling and sometimes they didn't. Connections or not, this was the current staff development fad so this is what we were going to do. There was a "dark age" where we (the counselors) almost did not exist. We had no influence on what was happening with our program.

His elementary perspective was aligned with the tallied topics from Counseling Advisory Board and was shared by Vonda speaking of the elementary meetings since 2004.

I do think that at our elementary counselor meetings - it is like fabulous! The meetings that we have, the topics we can cover, the problems that we can, you know, brainstorm on and how supportive it can be. I think that's really good.

Brenda compared the years prior to 2004 with those after it as to how counselors connected to the district initiatives through the work of the Counseling Advisory Board and the Steering Committee.

Because with Shawn, and this is where I said there was a little bit of disconnect between the Steering committee and the Advisory Board. We were having these meetings, but we were still having them within these individual circles of our existence; whereas with you, the circles started to intertwine. What the counselors did in this circle intertwined with what the district initiatives were in this other circle. And there was that overlap and that was one thing that I felt in terms of being truly collaborative where we had started as counselors and then what you brought to the table. There was more of that overlap between what counselors did and the district initiatives. Instead of existing outside of what they did; that was really a connecting of the dots there and that helped me to see. Because I think that with the Steering Committee and the Advisory Board, even

under the previous leadership, I'd go to those meetings and I'd feel like, "What are we accomplishing here?" It was as if we were just talking in circles about certain topics whereas when I went to the meetings under your leadership, I got it. The conversation about what we were doing as counselors connected to what we were doing as a district.

In 2004, as the elementary, middle school and high school counselors began meeting together on district designated professional development days, the concept of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) was introduced as a way to structure themselves for the work ahead of the department. Agendas and other documents from these meetings in 2004 indicate counselors had opportunities to select with whom they would work and what issue they would attempt to resolve by collecting data and analyzing the outcomes.

Three Professional Learning Community (PLC) teams of counselors identified the need to design how the department could systematically begin collecting data on the average time each counselor spent in each of the four categories of the state's model guidance program. In 2004, each of the three PLC teams took a different approach to tracking and recording the amount of time spent in each of the four categories. These pilots resulted in the K-12 guidance and counseling department adopting a tool, complete with a survey and process for electronically documenting counselor time and tasks, in 2005. After it was adopted, the use of the Time and Task Analysis tool became routine for the department, and the data from it informed later decisions, notably by informants' statements about some of the decisions made in the Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E) Study of 2009.

Six participants identified another tool that was created from the work of the structures; specifically, that of one of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

using data to drive decisions. In 2006, as a result of a counselor PLC using data, a new tool for Performance Based Counselor Evaluation was adopted by the district and was then used to evaluate counselors beginning in 2007. It was directly aligned with the national and state model guidance tenets. Vonda recalled the specific strategies for collaborative decision making (structures, routines and tools) used.

That was good. That needed to be done.

All (counselors) submitted. It was collaboration. We all submitted things from other districts and things we'd used before, things that we thought would be important. We had a sharing of forms and ideas. That was true collaboration. We picked pieces and parts.

We used time at a lot of our meetings, where we have the big sticky notes all over the wall. What do you see as the most important things? What do you see? What do you do here to help? You know we shared them. Then we'd go through and highlight. Condense them all. That is pure, true collaboration.

Cherie recalled much the same as she stated it in the context of the other decision making efforts of the department.

And that's why I think in recent years, not just last year, we have been able to do things like that. Like the evaluation tool. We've had, you know, more input. It has been through our development, things we've thought were more important. I think we've been given the responsibility of developing some things. That's important. If we want it, then how do we want it to look? And I think people are always willing to work for things that they think are important. Give outside time and whatever.

She commented on the relationship the participants had to the decisions being made about the Performance Based Counselor Evaluation tool and noted the importance of it to the group. Her statements indicated the willingness of participants to work extra time when the effort was of interest and relevant to them.

In describing the process in more detail, Cherie noted a tool used to ensure participants' voices were heard even if a person tended not to be one who would speak aloud in groups when giving input for making decisions.

And I think, you know that goofy little pink piece of paper and how you tallied this and put your emphasis there. I mean, it was more factual then. Because I tend to, you know, I am quiet and don't always speak out and sometimes, especially if you're in a large group, those people get heard that are always out there talking. So this way my input was as important as theirs. But I just didn't speak out. So, yeah, that has been huge.

### **Interactions Described in Decision Making**

Spillane (2005) stated the importance of the interactions in decision making with his approach to distributive leadership. "Aspects of the situation define and are defined by leadership practice in interaction with leaders and followers. Structures, routines, and tools are the means through which people act" (p. 5). The participants each described such interactions and informed the study as to the leadership qualities that resulted in the most influential changes in the department.

#### ***Will***

When describing the decision making process of 2009 for determining new compensation time procedures for work high school counselors and middle school counselors were expected to do during the summer outside contract time, Will recalled interactions among the leaders and followers in the situation.

That was definitely made with the input of those of us who it impacts most significantly. So, that was a problem solving process. We had this work to get done. And some of us did not feel as if we were being compensated for it, so we were looking at a finite amount of money. We weren't able to come up with more money to pay us, so we came up with this solution with the help of our fearless leader. And then through other discussions that took place with the stakeholders.

In contrast, Will described a decision that had been made in the same year for the entire district which had an impact on the guidance and counseling department in his building. Although it was not a decision made specifically for guidance and counseling programming, Will reported it had a direct effect on their work. The leaders and followers in this situation appeared to have very different interactions than the one described earlier in the guidance and counseling group. Will also summarized from his experiences that confusion and difficulties in implementation could have been avoided if “some of those people had been at the table from the very start” to give the necessary “input about how it looked.”

XLТ (the district summer school program) - I didn’t feel like that was handled very well. And it probably was just a building thing. I think that one person was kind of given the responsibility and then was supposed to implement it at the school is my understanding of how that came from central office. And in our building, the one who was responsible for it kind of jumped from one person to another and it was very hard to know who was kind of driving the ship. Because none of us had done it before, so that was, I think, a big part of it. But there was some controversy; not controversy but dissention about who was going to be in charge. Was somebody going to be in charge of the whole thing? Was somebody going to be in charge in parts of it? And that’s just, I think that had to do with the master scheduler has to be a part of some of it but wasn’t going to be around for some of it, so that was kind of hard. So that probably, the implementation of that was not handled as well. And number two: There were a lot of people who needed to be at the table to give input about how it looked and they weren’t really invited to the table. Or it was just kind of a here’s how it is going to be and found out later that some of those things weren’t going to work. And so I think if some of those people had been at the table from the very start, we could have avoided some of that.

### *Nora*

When asked to identify decisions made last year that were pivotal in changing the district’s guidance and counseling program, Nora described the interactions of those involved in making decisions about how to increase the efficiencies and effectiveness (E&E study) of the department.



I think probably the biggest thing I can think of was our E&E study. And how we came together to, as K-12 counselors, to talk about where our focus areas lie. And what things were most important to us. Where we felt like we really needed to concentrate our efforts. What I just jotted down were some of those things: guidance curriculum, structures, crisis response, scheduling, meeting the diverse needs of our students and family and community involvement. And so I think when we went through and took a survey K-12 of where folks landed on that continuum of less important to more important or wherever you need to put these, that was probably one of the biggest things that we did.

She went into even greater detail about the processes used, which shed light on the interactions of all counselors being involved in her description of the specific work with secondary counselors to determine a new compensation time process for work completed outside contract time in the summer.

I think for high school counselors, the piece where we were rethinking - summer enrollment and our extended contract days - I think that was enormous. Being able to come together as a cohesive secondary unit, or high school unit, to try to find something that would be fair to all of us. Knowing that we only have a certain number of days and how can we equally distribute those days and then, because the work is greater than the number of days how can we be compensated in a way that, again, works into that zero-sum game. So again, I think that was a big deal.

The process we utilized was first working within your building to have each department determine or create a list of tasks that do need to be completed over the summer. Coming together then, discussing those tasks: this is what we do, this is what we do. Allowed for folks to say, "Oh, we didn't add this" or "Yes, I forgot about that." But then, also, assigning times to each task. Having each, again each high school assign their own time as far as how long each of these tasks might take. And taking into consideration the variation by building. Once that information was determined, then we collectively, as a group, tried to come up with maybe some basic standards as far as...well this is....if we can all be compensated for this much time, what do we feel like is feasible with regard to potential comp time or something like that. Is there ...what can we come together with to take to higher district level leaders to say this is what we propose? Would you be in agreement with this? Would you support us if this is what we propose? You know, if we're working x-amount of hours.

Nora's reference to taking "to higher district level leaders" indicates the involvement of some leadership in the process she described but also alluded to the need for approval on this situation coming from other decision makers. As it is one related to

contracts and compensation, this would be expected and is evidence that not every decision is solely in the hands of those who are most affected by it on a daily basis.

***David***

In speaking of the decisions made and processes used in 2009, David recalled lots of decisions being made that were pivotal to the guidance and counseling program and labeled them as a part of the Effectiveness and Efficiency (E&E Study) work of the whole district. His recap of the interactions included how all areas worked together, sometimes in formalized structures like the Steering Committee and by regular routines such as meetings at different levels to find ways to improve the program.

We did a lot of decision making last year. And I think most important was just looking at how we could be efficient and effective as a K-12 program. And all three areas, elementary, middle school and high school individually and working together to see what would be the best way to make our program better. And we focused in on different areas with each level to do that.

We had many meetings to do that; through our individual level meetings, through our Steering Committee. And I know that there were other meetings and conferences with personnel, through staff development to make sure we were all on board together. Even our elementary meetings we heard about some of the other areas. Like with health, how they might connect with some of the work we were doing to see that we were all on the same page. So, that was most important: looking at our program from top to bottom and how we could make it most effective and efficient, and then implementing those changes this year and coming up with a plan to do that.

***Vonda***

When asked to describe decisions and the processes used in the previous years with the guidance and counseling program, Vonda focused on the people, the voices of all needing to be heard and the actions of the leaders and followers in the situation, particularly in the meetings that could be considered routines.

You would attend our meetings. If we had any concerns, you always addressed them. You got back to us, and I mean, that is collaboration! That is the most powerful thing of all. Everybody wants a voice and wants it to be heard. And so, when that happened, sometimes (she) could just pop in for a few minutes and boom, boom, boom, pick it up or even sending another person, like a central office person – (mentions name) or whomever. When you would send people in, they got the questions/concerns to take back. So that is definitely something. But see I don't know that that was a district decision. I think that was your decision to do those things as our leader.

And I really did think that our, those E&E studies were excellent. They were really....and our time-on-tasks – with (person) doing those data collections – that was powerful!

When probed to explain in greater detail the distinction between it being a district decision or a personal leader decision, Vonda continued her thoughts.

It is essential to have your key personnel have those people skills, have those listening skills.

Because somebody could step into your position, everything's going well and wonderfully smooth and take a different approach. And it would change the whole thing regardless of what the district says, because the leader does matter. I guess making sure that the people who are in charge, the leaders, understand, that everybody wants a voice and that's important. You don't always have to listen to it every day, the voice/voices, because there are some buildings where you have to be the leader and you can't be a leader and constantly listen to everybody else's ideas, you know. And then there are some people that listen to too many ideas instead of just going like, okay, here's what we're going to do.

I think it's somebody who's strong enough to understand and, and comfortable with their knowledge to give guidelines to others and be able to pick key people that can continue on. So, it's not all about them doing it. Delegate and trust key people. Let's go back to our strengths. Understanding who are the people that will get it done.

Vonda's explanation supports the idea of the need for the leader to discern the involvement level of participants in each decision making process.

## *Cherie*

Similar to others, articulating the process of decision making in the Effectiveness and Efficiency study of 2009 (E&E Study) was how Cherie identified the interactions that occurred.

E&E was probably pretty effective decision making. All the counselors individually completed surveys after we had identified the responsibilities and tasks of our jobs. We felt valued and listened to. It was more effective than just what we had done with other in-service time.

Those kinds of things that lead to facts. With our direct input we are part of the process. Things don't get "kind of" changed, rather the decision really changes things. I really like that.

Cherie continued with describing how people interact in those conditions.

And I think people are always willing to work for things that they think are important. Give outside time and whatever.

Question from the researcher: "Why do you think they are willing to do that?"

Because they care; they value the work. They want to improve their program. They are willing to give effort to make changes; keep it current. I think it is more, I don't know if sophisticated is the word? The program has evolved to meet the needs of our students and society. We need to start changing and looking at what we are doing to address those things. The counseling program is very much attuned to society, societal issues - homeless, free-reduced lunch, pregnancy - all those kind of societal issues are what we do.

I feel valued and feel like my input is valued too. I tend to support district initiatives and then, you know, kind of personalize it for how I need to make it happen here.

Cherie's words described the actions of the followers in the situation. She included not only the "how" but also the "why" of what they do in the decision making process. This illustrates the interactions in the situational context of feeling as if the input is valued based on the results of the work. There is direct reference to the followers caring and wanting to improve the program to meet the needs of the students being

served. Supporting district initiatives that align with this perspective appear to be important to the interactions of the followers with the leaders in the decision making process. Even the comment about personalizing it for how one can make it happen at her site extends the perception of relevance and importance of the work.

### ***Brenda***

As Brenda was not with the district in the most recent years of the time studied, her comments are a reflection of the first eight years being reviewed. When asked about her recollection of decisions being made, she spoke to the interactions of the participants, both leaders and followers, and in particular made statements about the need for the leader to set a tone to encourage input from all.

I feel that the administrator's style sets a strong tone for the direction of the process. In my experience there's a certain amount of openness to people. In terms of collaborative decision making the way that I see it is that you know you have to be open to other people's opinions, ideas, perceptions. You know that applies to all stakeholders, and I think that the leader absolutely sets that tone. And if the leader isn't soliciting feedback they're setting a tone. So, if a leader isn't talking with the folks he or she is trying to lead there's that sense of tone. So, whether they're even purposely meaning to set a tone or not, they're setting a tone. So, I do attribute it to the interactions of people. And the fact that even in a district as large as ours too, as much as there is collaborative decision making (and I have been a part of a lot of collaborative decision making) there are still a lot of stakeholders, for whatever reason, who are not a part of that. And I don't mean...I mean they are represented by a stakeholder but they may not specifically be someone who is a part of that collaborative decision making. So, sometimes they feel left out even though collaborative decision making is taking place.

Her conclusion of this statement with acknowledging that simply having collaborative decision making with stakeholders representing groups of people does not mean everyone feels a part of the process. And when probed with the question, "What do you think needs to be done to engage a higher number of those stakeholders at a higher level?" she responded:

That's a good question! Well, the first thing that comes into my mind and you're going to laugh at this because you know me. One of the first things is the relationship building. Development of relationships, I feel like, is pivotal. Just, one of the phrases I've always said is "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." And you are not going to get buy-in from someone unless they trust you. Or unless they have developed, I feel or I guess I should say I feel that the relationship piece is so pivotal. Sometimes people feel alienated or they are cynical about the process, so those are the folks you want to spend your extra energy on sometimes to get them to buy in to the process. You know I feel like, it's relationships and extra positive energy expended around those folks that gets the buy-in to the initiative.

Brenda's focus on the relationship building was a good example of distributive leadership's decision making approach being couched in terms of the interactions among the participants at all levels of the organization. Her explanation of a leader's need to "spend your extra energy" on getting people to buy in to the decision was representative of how leaders, followers and situations interact in the process.

### ***Linda***

As a participant who had not been in the district for the last two years of the time being studied, Linda struggled to at first identify specific decisions that had been pivotal to the guidance and counseling program in recent years as evidenced in her first response.

I don't know. Over the years, I don't know that it changed. The program itself, I don't know that it changed a great deal. Because we still did the classroom guidance. We, I do think more and more was added onto our plate; Youth Friends and...but as for...I'm trying to think what some of the changes were.

Later in the interview, Linda discussed some structures and routines that changed the program and were related to the decision making.

Having a steering committee helped. I think our staff development improved.

Going to K-12 format for support and leadership was great as we (the counselors) had called for that for years. Professional Learning Communities were created and became part of the school day with release time. Another good change and at

first we called them learning teams. We met once a month and I'm not sure how that decision was made. Was it (counselor's name) and some of those who met with you? That was so appreciated. It was. And especially by someone like me who remembered what we used to try to do it on our own even. Okay, we're going to meet after school on Thursday, the third Thursday of the month, maybe two people would show because people were too busy to try to do it before or after school.

While Linda recalled some key changes that began to influence the decision making processes and programs, she did not recall specifically how the original decision to change the structure was made. However, her suggestion in the question of "Was it (counselor's name) and some of those who met with you?" was accurate, verified as the "how" of this decision being made through the other interviews and the minutes of the guidance and counseling steering committee.

### ***Superintendent Richard***

When asked "Think about decisions made last year that were pivotal in changing the district's guidance and counseling program. Recall and describe in descending importance those decisions," Richard answered, identifying structures and tools used in the decision making process.

The ongoing look at structure, reorganization of guidance and counseling, E&E, Time and Task Analysis; these gave, I think, a real introspective look on the part of counselors in terms of where their efforts were and really in the shift of where their efforts ought to be.

Later in the conversation, Richard described connections to the work and importance of collaboration needed to engage followers for the best results in the decision making situation.

I don't think people give their best efforts unless there is a need to be a part of this. This whole spirit of collaborative leadership generates innovations, enthusiastic efforts, and extraordinary accomplishments. I mean whatever you want to call it. You don't get it without that feeling that there is a collaborative

nature and what I do is important and the empowerment of people to expand, if you will. Or to try to do beyond. The entrepreneurial kind of spirit. You just don't get it without it.

### ***Summary of Interactions Described in Decision Making***

All eight participants described the relationships and interactions of the leader(s) and followers in given situations experienced by the department over the 10 years studied. The themes emerging from these conversations about the interactions were leadership characteristics recognized by participants in the process: building relationships; asking for and giving input and listening; starting with parameters then being flexible as the situation evolved; and determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions.

Brenda noted the priority placed on relationship building as well as acknowledged such interactions take time and energy.

One of the first things is the relationship building. Development of relationships, I feel like, is pivotal. One of the phrases I've always said is "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care." And you are not going to get buy-in from someone unless they trust you.

Now, with that being said, also the extra energy, the extra relationship, that's the extra mile that requires a lot of time, as well. That is one of the key concepts around the whole shared decision making piece is that there is a certain amount of time that has to be devoted to ensure that the collaborative decision making is going to be successful. And that I think is the toughest part.

Asking for input, giving input and listening took center stage in many of the participants' explanations of decision making they described as pivotal in making changes. As Vonda stated, "... it is essential to have your key personnel have those listening skills." To Cherie the level of importance elevated itself as she remarked about her desire for it to continue.



I want to continue efforts to gather our input, not just brainstorming. It is important to gather information from us. We need continual feedback so we continue to feel free to express our feelings. That has been done at our monthly meetings really well. We share and relate to people doing our same job. We are allowed to share in decision making. I do feel as if I have been heard.

Will's comparison example of decision making processes in which he has felt valued and those in which he has not felt valued illustrated the point of the ability of participants to make distinctions and judgments about the interactions of those involved.

I have been involved more because I feel like the district has moved more toward involving the people that they are going to involve and in many cases what our involvement, sort of the yield of our involvement, does become the decision. There are some cases where I felt like I've been involved but that a different decision is made. And...and that's going to happen. I mean I think that's the way that needs to be because other people are in charge of things for a reason. But I...sometimes...I remember...I know that I've felt in the last three years or so that I'm involved in kind of change processes or decision making processes about change and I've come away feeling like I think maybe there was already an answer. And I was being involved to ensure that we could always say that there was involvement.

The expectation the group start with clear parameters as a part of the decision making process as well as their (leader and followers) ability to be flexible with the situation as it evolved was of importance to those describing the interactions they have experienced. Vonda described such a leader.

I think it's somebody who's strong enough to understand and, and comfortable with their knowledge to give guidelines to others and be able to pick key people that can continue on. So, it's not all about them doing it. Which is what that one principal leader was about. So the leader can actually go, "You know what? This needs to be done. Alright, do you guys want to do this piece?" Then, "Bring it back to me on Friday." Delegate and trust people. Let's go back to our strengths. Understanding who are the people that will get it done.

Not micro-managing. But leader again. Key guideline: And be able to give those parameters and guidelines. And still listen and be flexible and adjustable.

Yet, these are the guidelines and these are the steps and we will move through them.

Vonda also stated the case for the leader having the ability to decipher which decisions need input and what level of input should be granted to the participants.

Input doesn't mean you have to listen to every little thing. And sometimes there's...there does come a time when you have to make a decision based on what's best for the group. And that's the leader's job. Collaboration is taking the ideas and thoughts into consideration.

Will gave an example of a time when a group of people were brought together in which the result of decisions made did not lead to the expected outcomes. He described his excitement for bringing staff leaders together with counselors and administrators to determine some new division of labor responsibilities.

...and so, I was so excited about that because I really felt like that was an opportunity for other people to see what we (as counselors) all did and to be able to kind of have a new appreciation and awareness of those kinds of things. And it was kind of interesting. It was not the leaders who came away with a different decision; it was the individuals at the table who basically said, "Here's all I'm really able to, willing to do and I'm going to find any way I can to ensure that's all I do." So, I didn't really feel like it was successful. I was excited about the process because I felt like it was going to yield kind of more of a team mentality. We could truly have a student services department where we would be able to look at all of this stuff and determine where does it make the most sense and how is it easiest for our kids and our parents and that kind of a thing. And I just think that with all the politics and just kind of the individuals involved that...that really didn't happen. And I think that at the central office level, it was kind of left to the buildings to have the fortitude to enforce that and for all sorts of reasons, of which I'm probably not aware because I can't or shouldn't be, that didn't happen. And it really... pretty much everything stayed about the same with some very important exceptions. There were some important things that did ...I think we have a great relationship, for example, with our gifted resource specialist. You know she does all that I think she is able to do as a professional to help us, even though we don't feel like it is enough. We feel like we really need more from her but we kind of now know what we can realistically expect from that team member.

While there were some positive unexpected outcomes, one being a newly established relationship which Will described with a colleague, he was clear that his expectations of change as a result of participating in the process had not been achieved. He questioned the involvement of some of the participants in the process and alluded to the idea it might have been more effective for the leader(s) to simply state the expectations rather than involving everyone to share the decision.

### **Situational Needs for Decision Making in 2009**

All six study participants who were still working in the district in 2009 identified the Effectiveness and Efficiency Study (E&E) as a “decision made last year that was pivotal in changing the district’s guidance and counseling program.” Specifically, Nora summarized the sentiment of the participants interviewed as she highlighted the structures, routines and tools used in decision making in 2009.

I think the unique situation the counseling department has is that we have so many of these various rinse cycles that we can put ideas through. And we...I don’t know that every program or department has this type of Steering Committee, as well as an Advisory Board, and this type of thing where we have all these mediums through which we can run ideas and gain feedback. And so I think we’re really fortunate to be in that type of situation. Where you don’t feel like decisions are all being made for you nor do you feel like you are making decisions in a vacuum. I feel like we have a lot of great perspectives coming from a variety of sources.

I said before with the E&E study and thinking about focus areas we just...we did this survey. So the survey was probably one of our process standards to figure that out, collecting that data. Organizing that into what was important to us as a whole and what could be broken down by grade level areas. What could be a focus area at the high school may not be the same focus area or at least be in the same ranked order of importance as say elementary counselors might have it.

Commonly identified, the Effectiveness and Efficiency Study (E&E) of 2009 was a situation, and each spoke of how decision making for it connected to the work of the existing structures of the Steering Committee, the Advisory Board and ongoing

Professional Learning Communities. Regular meetings of these structures and those organized by grade levels for counseling services acted as routines, as well as did the yearly review of budget spending and planning for the following year's budget. As Nora recalled, it was the counselor surveys as well as the Time and Task Analysis records and student achievement scores that had been kept for years which were tools used to provide data for the decision making. This was validated by other participants and the written records of agendas and minutes from the gatherings of the department's teams and committees.

David also described the process with the Effectiveness and Efficiency Study in detail.

Recall with E&E: We divided into smaller groups to work single topic or area, provide input then share out and get input on ideas from the large group. There were surveys that we completed and information disseminated to everyone. It helped us better focus on areas of need.

In most cases, there is always opportunity for input by anyone. One of the nice things about our group is that most people feel they can be honest in the process. They know that it is okay to share and come up with an idea no one has thought of before, "Oh yeah, what about this?" We had a four- or five-step process we went through for the E&E. It was organized and structured for consensus and decision and where we wanted to go.

Cherie echoed the importance of the data gleaned from the tools used in the established routines and those employed specifically for the Effectiveness and Efficiency Study.

E&E with data equaled the next logical step with shared decision making. The data – it hit home. Not what can we do, what will we do. We have to do something different. Obviously, we have to meet those needs of students.

Nora also used another situation, one of determining an enrollment time line, as she described the structures, routines and tools used in a 2009 decision process.

The Enrollment Time line. I feel like we had several meetings. I feel like we had meetings with counselors, specifically. I think we had, and that could even be broken down by grade levels. We had middle school counselors and high school counselors meeting separately on that; then, together. We also had a meeting - I'm remembering a meeting at central office where we had other folks involved. We had administrators there from both the middle school and the high school levels. I think we had almost anybody who is involved with enrollment come to that meeting to discuss rethinking and restructuring it with the possibility of what's in the best interest of our students. How are we going to make the most effective and efficient use of our time? What are the big things that we want to make sure that everyone has? You know asking "Is our current structure appropriate? Do we need to make changes?"

She summed up with her thoughts on how the involvement of those who were most affected by the decision had increased over the years.

I think that we continue to utilize collaborative decision making to a greater and greater degree. I think that counseling is fortunate. The district counseling is fortunate that we have our Steering Committee and we also have our Advisory Committee where we have an opportunity to bounce ideas off each other as well as folks that are outside of the counseling department, folks who are inside and others who are from the community. So I really feel like that we are more and more involved in the decisions that are made that affect our department. Where I feel like probably a few years ago, we were more the receivers of what was going to happen to us. I feel like our input is more and more valuable each year, and that we have greater impact with what happens with our program.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the experiences of the eight district employees who participated in this research study were varied, and the informants originated from a variety of school and school district backgrounds. By discussing with them their experience of the phenomenon of decision making in one district's guidance and counseling unit over the 10-year period studied, I have sought to distill the phenomenon down to its essential elements.

To the analytical process I have also brought my own perspective because of my personal experience with this district and department, as bracketed earlier. As a researcher engaged in the reflective process and as a member of the group, I was indeed part of the research. I have described the themes that emerged from the data as they aligned with Spillane's framework of distributed leadership. The dimensions of decision making pertinent to answering *What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?* included:

1. Interactions of Participants

- a. Relationship building
- b. asking for and giving input and listening
- c. starting with parameters then being flexible as the situation evolved
- d. determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions

2. Situational Needs

- a. development of the Time and Task Analysis process
- b. development of a new performance-based counselor evaluation process
- c. development of an enrollment time line
- d. development of ideas for increasing our efficiency and effectiveness in light of forthcoming budget constraints (E&E Study)

3. Structures, Routines and Tools Used in Decision Making

- a. Structures
  - i. Counseling Advisory Board
  - ii. Steering Committee

- iii. District Leadership and Structure of Department
- iv. Professional Learning Communities
- b. Routines
  - i. Meetings of Advisory Board, Steering Committee, Department and Professional Learning Communities
  - ii. Strategies of Shared Decision Making
  - iii. Processes to Collect, Review and Analyze Data
- c. Tools
  - i. Time and Task Analysis Form and Data collected from it
  - ii. Performance Based Counselor Evaluation Form
  - iii. State Model Guidance Program Guidelines
  - iv. Student Demographic and Achievement Data

The changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009 were tied directly to the leadership structure. A change in leadership structure and leadership personnel for the department in 2004 coincided with changes in the structures, routines and tools of the whole department, Steering Committee and Counseling Advisory Board. Evidence indicated an increase in collaborative (K-12 counselors and leader) development of tools used to collect and examine data, as well as an increase in the use of data to make decisions in the department.

The interactions of the leader and followers changed with the changes in structure and personnel. Over time, the interactions improved as the structures, tools and routines were developed and enhanced by having increased involvement of the counselors in the

decision making process. The interactions perceived as contributing to the decisions with the most positive impact on the department were characterized as the participants' abilities to: build relationships; ask for and give input and listen; start with parameters then be flexible as the situation evolved; and determine who, when and how much to involve others in decisions.



## CHAPTER FIVE: INTERPRETATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Summary

This research was designed to answer:

*What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 1999 and 2009?*

With this research being oriented toward action and process, fuel was given to the intention that identifiable concepts and relationships would emerge. The orientation toward action and process also supported determinations being made as to whether or not emergent concepts and relationships are relevant or irrelevant to the phenomenon of collaborative decision making in the distributed leadership framework. Relevant concepts and relationships should cluster into categories and attempts would ensue to make sense of the categories in new, rather than standard ways. Eventually, a theoretical framework would be developed to explain the phenomena of how decisions were being made and how this process changed over the 10-year period. The sources for this researchable problem were participant interviews, personal and professional experience, the non-technical literature and the technical literature.

This study described decision making over time as distilled from the experience of guidance counseling professionals. The goal of this study was to define relevant concepts and relationships of decision making, identifying the interactions of leaders and followers in given situations and how tools, routines and structures employed by educators during the years spanned by the study.

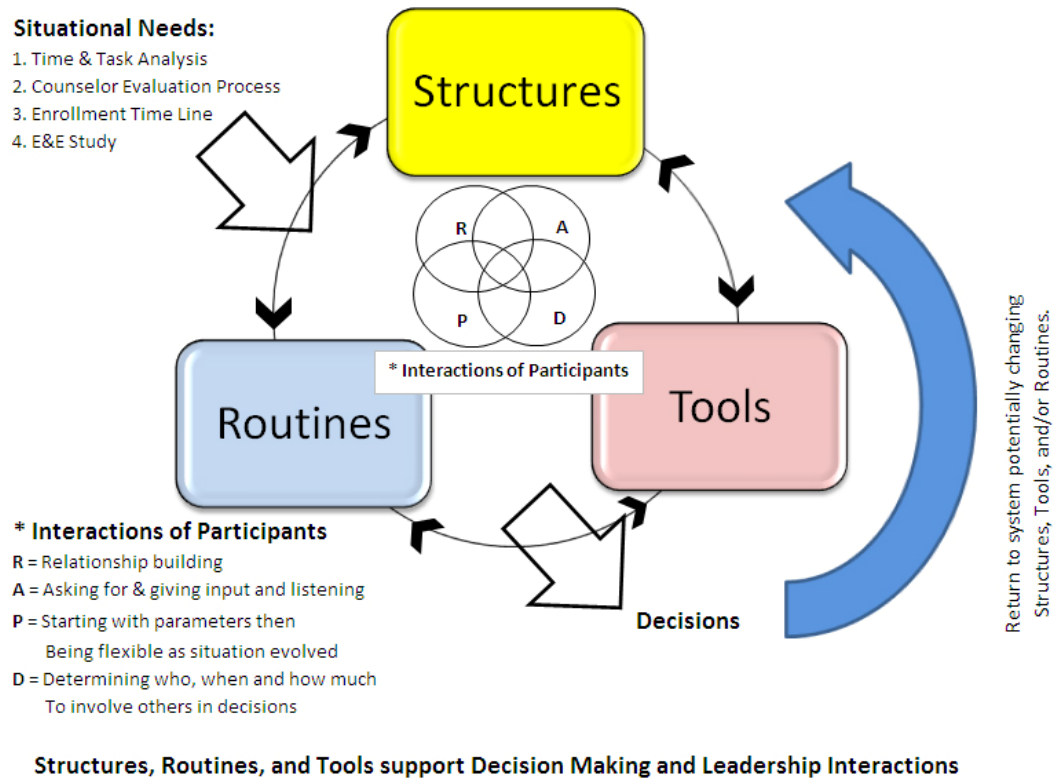
The participants for this research study were eight informants from the district studied. Five of them remained in the position of counselor with the studied district; one had retired from counseling; one had resigned to stay home with young children after having been an elementary principal; and the superintendent of the district studied had retired. They came from all different levels of K-12 education and from a variety of school and school district settings in their career histories.

Data were collected by conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews with research participants over the course of a three-month period in 2009. The interview data were also cross-referenced with the district documents reviewed. The process involved checking dates, reviewing content of minutes from meetings and reviewing data gathered on the guidance and counseling department to check the accuracy of statements made during the interviews.

### **Discussion of Results**

The experiences of the eight district employees who participated in this research study, along with my own experiences in the process, were varied. The discussion, reflection and analysis of decision making in one district's guidance and counseling unit allowed the decision phenomena to be reduced to their essential elements. The emergent themes aligned with Spillane's (2005) definition of distributed leadership as pictured in Figure 3. Leadership is distributed over an interactive web of people and situations as leaders and followers make decisions given key elements of their situation, including organizational structures, routines and tools.

**Figure 3: Taylor Knight's Model of Distributed Leadership**



The dimensions of decision making pertinent to answering *What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?* included:

1. Interactions of Participants
  - a. relationship building
  - b. asking for and giving input and listening
  - c. starting with parameters then being flexible as the situation evolved
  - d. determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions
2. Situational Needs
  - a. development of the Time and Task Analysis process
  - b. development of a new performance-based counselor evaluation process

- c. development of an enrollment time line
  - d. development of ideas for increasing our efficiency and effectiveness in light of forthcoming budget constraints (E&E Study)
3. Structures, Routines and Tools Used in Decision Making
- a. Structures
    - i. Counseling Advisory Board
    - ii. Steering Committee
    - iii. District Leadership and Structure of Department
    - iv. Professional Learning Communities
  - b. Routines
    - i. Meetings of Advisory Board, Steering Committee, Department and Professional Learning Communities
    - ii. Strategies of Shared Decision Making
    - iii. Processes to Collect, Review and Analyze Data
  - c. Tools
    - i. Time and Task Analysis Form and Data collected from it
    - ii. Performance Based Counselor Evaluation Form
    - iii. State Model Guidance Program Guidelines
    - iv. Student Demographic and Achievement Data

Interactions of Participants. At the heart of the model is a commitment by the leader and the participants to execute the decision making. Successful execution is dependent on the individuals involved in the collaborative team accepting the responsibility to work together as true professionals (Dufour and Eaker, 1998). The

guidance counselors identified four key elements for successful execution of the decision making: *relationship building; asking for and giving input and listening; starting with parameters from the leader, then everyone being flexible as the situation evolved; and determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions.* As Riordan (2003) suggested, decision making is shared by multiple individuals at different levels of the organization. Central to this model are the ***Interactions of the Participants***, with *participants* being defined as the *leader* and the *followers*.

This model extends Spillane's (2005) concept of distributed leadership as it begins to answer his question: Is distributed leadership an organizational quality rather than an individual attribute? Demonstrated in this study is the fact the decision making of this group was dependent on the leader and the followers, and it was the dynamic of everyone involved leading to decisions that impacted the guidance and counseling department. There was evidence of the participants shifting their work and interactions with others as a result of the actions of individuals in the group and the group as one entity. In addition to the leader having influence by her actions, other individuals in the group had influence on the leader, the group and one another.

Situational Needs. Dufour and Eaker (1998) suggested that work aligned closely with common goals, collective efforts and shared insights of those deeply engaged in an analysis of their current practice and behavior would result in the highest level of achievement for students. Table 3 illustrates how the teacher actions Dufour and Eaker studied parallel the counselor actions studied in this research.

**Table 3: DuFour & Eaker's Teacher Actions Parallel to Counselor Actions**

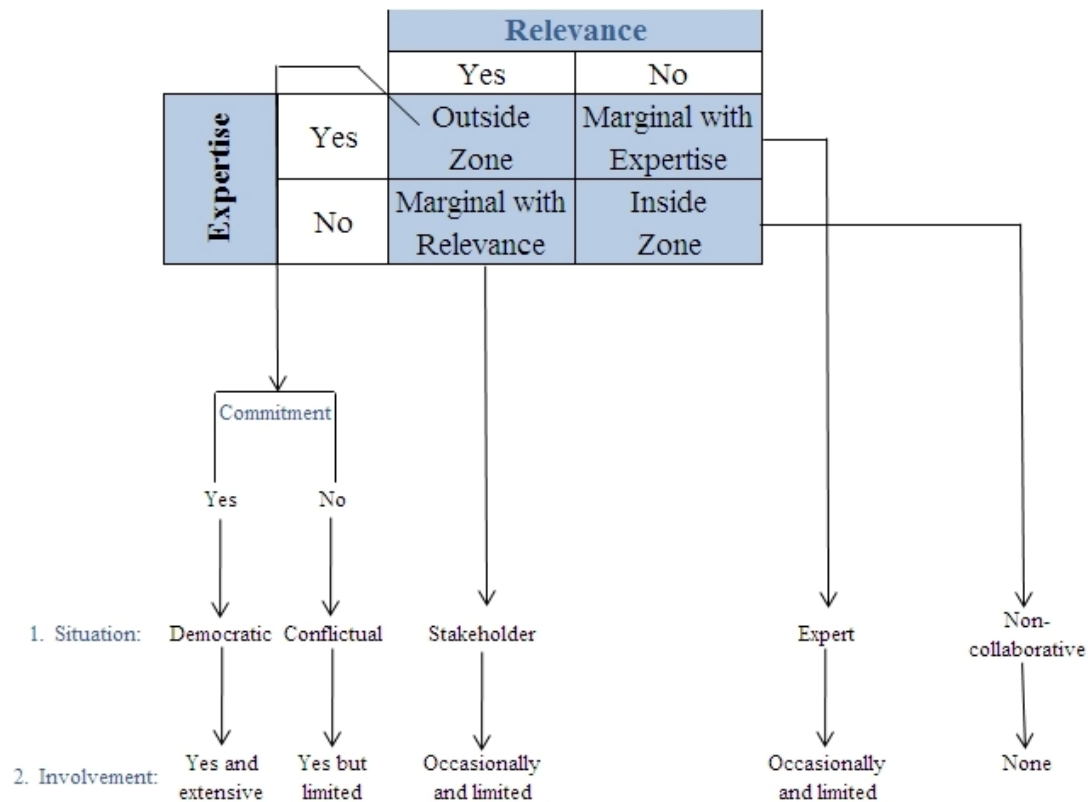
Teachers' Actions	Counselors' Actions
Share student achievement data	Share Time & Task Analysis Data
Discuss daily practices	Discuss daily practices in relationship to others in the school
Identify learning they need to experience in order to positively impact work with students	Identify learning they need in order to change their role(s) in the school related to increasing student achievement as the demographics of the district changed

As indicated by Superintendent Richard, the impetus of supporting the K-12 guidance counselors with one leader was expected to improve services to students and enhance the public perception of the work being done in this department. To advance the group from having been driven by the interests of their individual levels (elementary, middle school or high school) and their individual school sites, the structure of Professional Learning Communities was purposefully introduced. Gathering input from all the counselors through surveys and face-to-face large group and small group meetings, including the structures already in place (Counseling Advisory Board, Steering Committee and level meetings), along with meeting with individual counselors, we worked to identify common goals for our collective efforts. One conversation at a time, we increased our alignment with one another and the district's goals as a whole. By working on the "real work" as seen in Table 3's depiction of our efforts with the Time and Task Analysis, we had everyone engaged in reviewing the data and determining what our priorities and needs were.

Engaging participants in meaningful and purposeful work is an effective way for leaders to increase productivity and results with decision making (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1996). Taking actions that aligned the idea of meaningful and purposeful work with the concepts presented by Hoy and Tarter's (1995) model for

Decision Situation and Subordinate Involvement (Figure 1) resulted in the K-12 guidance counselors having what they labeled “important” work to do.

**Figure 1: Decision Situation and Subordinate Involvement**



Repeatedly, the participants spoke of the changes in decisions made in the department since 2004 being those of importance. Their statements of “we want it,” “we need it,” “will work for it,” “important for our jobs,” and “important for the students who we see” were just a few of the phrases used when the counselors were speaking of the importance of the work they were doing in the Professional Learning Communities. There was time and effort spent to “make connections” (as described using this terminology by five interviewees) between the district initiatives with helping increase student achievement and the guidance and counseling department’s efforts.

There was a focus on maximizing the time and energy the counselors spent on making decisions for the good of the whole district by continuing to engage them in those efforts where they had the highest level of expertise, as well as the highest levels of relevance to their work in schools each day. This resulted in the time they spent in the Professional Learning Communities being purposeful, meaningful and areas in which the counselor believed we could effect the greatest degree of change to improve student achievement. As they got to make choices, within parameters established by the group of counselors from the Steering Committee, they felt empowered and enthused to continue the journey of improving the department to best serve students and the district goals. Their level of commitment to doing what was best for the students they serve was found to be very high; therefore, we could operate in a democratic situation with an extensive amount of involvement on some very key situational needs.

Four of those key situational needs were: development of the Time and Task Analysis process, development of a new performance-based counselor evaluation process, development of an enrollment time line, and development of ideas for increasing our efficiency and effectiveness in light of forthcoming budget constraints (E&E Study). These are defined as *Situational Needs* in the model for these reasons.

1. *Situational* refers to the fact they happened in the context of the district at the period being studied.
  - a. In addition to the changing demographics of the local area and the district being called to serve higher numbers of underserved youth, the district was being called to meet the federal mandates of No Child Left Behind as well as the state standards for performance.



- b. The Board of Education, as a result of some comments from the public, had expressed concern to the superintendent about the services being provided by the guidance and counseling program.
  - c. Decreasing state funding and local tax base funding had started and was predicted to be a pattern for the next few years in 2009, the last year of the studied period.
2. *Needs* refers to the specific areas the K-12 guidance and counseling department could use to address some of the *situational* elements presenting themselves.
- a. Development of the Time and Task Analysis process would allow for taking snapshots of the daily routines of counselors in each of the schools. By systemically and systematically recording the actions of each counselor at least five times each semester, the data could be reviewed to know prioritization of tasks being done at each site and each level of operation.
  - b. Development of a new performance-based counselor evaluation process would give increased importance to the actual responsibilities of the counselors aligned with the state's Model Guidance Program in contrast to the past practice of evaluating counselors using the district's performance-based teacher evaluation process.
  - c. Development of an enrollment time line would give increased importance to the role the counselors and others play in assisting students to achieve in school, especially high school and middle school, related to the

selection of coursework related to each student's personal talents and interests.

- d. Development of ideas for increasing our efficiency and effectiveness (E&E Study) in light of forthcoming budget constraints would assist the efforts of how to help everyone be more productive and find creative ways to do more with fewer financial and human resources.

All four of these key *Situational Needs* required making decisions that would have significant impact on the K-12 guidance and counseling department; therefore, it was critical that input from the counselors be gathered. In contrast to simply asking for their input occasionally and giving the counselors limited decision making opportunities, per Hoy and Tarter's (1995) model, these issues had significant relevance to the counselors and they had a high degree of expertise with each of them so the decisions were brought to the group of counselors to research and resolve in their Professional Learning Communities.

Structures, Routines and Tools Used in Decision Making. The *structures* of Counseling Advisory Board and Steering Committee were in place prior to 2000 and these structures remained in place throughout the 10-year period reviewed in this research. A structure change that occurred in 2004 was that of the elementary and secondary counselors being unified under the direction of one leader for the department. In turn, the K-12 guidance and counseling department integrated itself into Professional Learning Communities. These two new structures coincided with changes in the routines of the department.

The *routines* of the department were defined as the meetings of the department's structures; strategies of shared decision making; and processes to collect, review and analyze data. Along with the new structure of K-12 leadership for the department in 2004, came changes to the meetings of the Counseling Advisory Board and Steering Committee. Specifically, the topics changed from being primarily report only by the leaders to primarily input gathering from all participants. In addition, the agenda items changed from the majority of them being high school or secondary focused to being K-12 related.

Coinciding with the changes in the agenda items of the meetings, the group began using more specific strategies for shared decision making. As a way of increasing the collection of input, counselors and members of the Counseling Advisory Board and Steering Committees were surveyed on a regular basis beginning in 2004. Agendas and minutes support the interviewees' reports of the increased number of strategies, such as brainstorming ideas to resolve issues, tallying people's votes for resolutions, asking counselors to bring examples of good forms or processes to use in departmental efforts, and including everyone's opinion by using written forms for input and feedback on solutions being considered. In particular, the changes referenced in this portion of the model were closely connected to comments participants made about "wanting all voices to be heard" and the "leader listening and setting the tone to encourage input from all." The *Interactions of Participants* of asking for and giving input and listening and starting with parameters then being flexible as the situation evolved were aligned with the changes reported in the department.

Lastly, with the changes in routines, the processes to collect, review and analyze data changed as the structure of Professional Learning Communities evolved. Based on the premise of making decisions using the data and expecting counselors to analyze their actions based on the data, the Professional Learning Communities of counselors had to revise the *tools* used to collect data and in many instances had to create new tools to collect and record such data.

One such tool created by the counselors to collect data on the actions of the counselors was the Time and Task Analysis Form. Electronic surveys of the counselors were conducted for the first time in 2005 as a way to collect data for the Time and Task Analysis process. The data from it were used repeatedly and more regularly each year between 2005 and 2009 by the structures of the Counseling Advisory Board, Steering Committee and Professional Learning Communities to drive decisions being made in the quest of the counselors to improve services to students.

Another tool created and used by the department and district to improve the work of counselors was the Performance-Based Counselor Evaluation Form. After reviewing the data from the Time and Task Analysis, the Professional Learning Communities of counselors determined this as one way to communicate to building principals the role of the counselors and to hold counselors accountable to the primary responsibilities expected in the state's Model Guidance Program. Using the state's Model Guidance Program Guidelines as a tool for the framework, the Professional Learning Communities continued to refine the Time and Task Analysis and the Performance-Based Counselor Evaluation tools and processes.

In addition to the structures of the counselors becoming more comfortable with using data about their own actions, they increased their comfort with using student demographic and achievement data to make decisions. By 2009, the Professional Learning Communities were reviewing their actions in relationship to the district's graduation rate and achievement trends of the subgroups of students being served in the classroom.

### **The Answer**

*What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?*

The changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009 were tied directly to the leadership structure. A change in leadership structure and leadership personnel for the department in 2004 coincided with changes in the interactions of participants resulting in changes in the structures, routines and tools used in decision making. Evidence indicated an increase in collaborative (K-12 counselors and leader) development of tools used to collect and examine data, as well as an increase in the use of data to make decisions in the department.

Figure 4: Taylor Knight's Model of Distributed Leadership depicted the interactions of the guidance and counseling staff and district leadership over the 10-year period studied. As situational needs were considered, participants interacted in given structures (Counseling Advisory Board and Steering Committee) and created new structures in the Professional Learning Communities. The participants collaboratively

revised former routines, and developed new routines and tools to accomplish the work of making decisions. The generating and analyzing of data using the routines and tools increased with the participants' increased understanding of how data could improve their work with increasing student achievement. In addition, the interviewees reported an increased level of personal and professional accountability for the work being done as their input in the decisions increased.

The interactions of the leader and followers changed with the changes in structure and personnel. Over time the interactions improved as the structures, routines and tools were developed and enhanced by having increased involvement of the counselors in the decision making process. The interactions perceived as contributing to the decisions with the most positive impact on the department were characterized as the participants' commitment to execute leadership through: building relationships; asking for and giving input and listening; starting with parameters then being flexible as the situations evolved; and determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions.

In order to validate the research and honor the participants' voices, three of the interviewees were asked to read this body of work and share their perspectives on it. The feedback from each of these participants indicated the study is an accurate reflection of the changes that occurred in decision making in the guidance and counseling department between 2000 and 2009.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

“There is no school for leaders that will teach them exactly how to make their district into one that will leave no child behind” (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). Therefore, it

makes it all the more important for research to document and record the specific, detailed interactions of collaborative leaders in results-oriented organizations as a way of informing professionals. Who are the leaders who believe in empowering the professionals in the schools each day to make decisions about what is needed to serve each and every child? How can a collaborative leader connect stakeholders to differentiating the system rather than simply differentiating a lesson occasionally to help students learn?

My intent was to lay out one picture of distributed leadership, rather than provide a comprehensive review of various perspectives or narrowly define the concept. Based on the findings and interpretation of this research study, one potential area of interest for future research is the development of other school distributed leadership frameworks. For instance, one could review a building's decision making process or that of another group of district-wide personnel such as nurses or special education teachers.

A second recommendation for future study is to consider the impact of the interactions on the functionality of a group's structures, routines and tools. As indicated, the participants of this study placed value in the leader's and their own actions and practices when interacting in the decision making process. Building relationships; asking for and giving input and listening; starting with parameters then being flexible as the situation evolved; and determining who, when and how much to involve others in decisions appeared as key factors in the efforts. Perhaps through a quantitative study it would be possible to determine the order of significance and correlation of those actions in relationship to the decisions made or the participants' satisfaction with the decisions made.

As leadership practice is not only about what people do, but how and why they do it, a third area of possible interest for study could be the motivating factors for participants in a distributed leadership experience. This study has shown evidence that changes in decisions occur as a result of a change in the leadership personnel and structure of a department. However, with those changes came additions in other structures, routines and tools that were primarily determined by the participation of the counselors in Professional Learning Communities. Interviewees made comments about the work “being meaningful” and related to their efforts with students. This could be a good place from which to launch an investigation into how and why people engage at different levels in a distributed leadership culture.

### **Implications for Practice and Educational Leadership**

Public schools need systemic change to increase student achievement, and the involvement of all the stakeholders in decision making is imperative. A distributed leadership approach in which everyone assumes responsibility for the daily decisions being made in the schoolhouse and in the classroom is necessary to change the way in which students experience learning. *Such an approach requires the leader to be a learner in the collaborative community, rather than being a person who has all the answers to lead.* Public school leaders need to rethink leadership of decision making to improve student achievement. In particular, if we strive to bring systemic change to public education to meet the needs of students, we must engage in true distributed leadership decision making processes.

Professional empowerment is paramount to success in the rapidly changing context of education in the 21st century as schools are expected to operate in an



increasingly complex world. Critical to a district's effectiveness in serving *all* students when they need to meet rigorous standards is an organization's ability to rely on competent educators to use rules and procedures as guides rather than strict formats to be applied in the same way with every child and every situation. Effective structures, routines and tools must become staples in the situations faced, and all must be willing to learn from decisions made then monitor and adjust the structures, routines and tools as the context changes. When decisions can be made by those who have the most knowledge and expertise about the specifics of the situation (ie., the teacher in the classroom or a counselor in an office working with a student), a district can expect a higher level of student achievement because the system will differentiate to meet the needs of individual learners at a more rapid pace.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Semi-structured Interview Process**

## **SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROCESS**

**What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?**

Principal Investigator: Leigh Anne Taylor Knight Faculty Supervisor: Dr. George Crawford

### **INTRODUCTION**

I am completing research as a doctoral student at the University of Kansas, and you are being asked to participate by completing an interview with me. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the ways decisions are made in a school district's guidance and counseling program. The benefit of this research for you is the opportunity to help school leaders understand, foster, and strengthen collaborative decision making. The overall benefit is for school leaders, administrators, and policy makers to better understand collaborative decision making in order to help their efforts to foster, strengthen, and support collaborative decision making. The source of my personal interest in the ways decisions are made in such a context stems from having participated in a variety of decision making processes and experiencing varying levels of engagement by stakeholders over the course of my own career in education.

With your permission, I will complete an interview with you that will last approximately one hour or less. The interview will be audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by me. In order to protect your identity, a pseudonym will be used rather than your true name and identifying details such as school, grade level, and location will be precluded in the aggregate data that is produced. Your responses, along with the responses of other participants, will be analyzed and coded for themes and key concepts. If you express the interest, I will be glad to share the interview transcript and research findings with you so that you can review them.

I do not anticipate any risk to you as a result of your participation in this study. Your participation will benefit society by helping school leaders and policy makers understand, foster, and strengthen collaborative decision making. Your signature on the Consent and Authorization Form certifies that you have decided to participate in this study having read and understood the information presented. You are free to decide not to participate in this study. You can also withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the investigators or the University of Kansas.

Sometimes study participants have questions or concerns about their rights. In that case, you should call the University of Kansas at (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu). You may also ask either of us, Principal Investigator Leigh Anne Taylor Knight or Faculty Investigator Dr. George Crawford, questions at any time.

Do you have any questions at this time? (If there are questions, the researcher will answer them.)

If not, we will begin the interview.

#### QUESTIONS

1. State your name and current position (former position) in (name of the district).
2. Thoroughly describe your professional experiences (positions held, years of experience, and sites at which you have worked).
3. Think about decisions made last year that were pivotal in changing the district's guidance and counseling program for the better. Recall and describe in descending importance those decisions.
4. Thinking about each of the decisions you listed, tell me in as much detail as you can recall the processes used in making each of these decisions.
5. How did decisions made last year differ procedurally from decisions made in the previous ten years?
6. Is there any information you would like to share about decision making in the guidance and counseling program that this interview has not yet allowed you to discuss? If so, please share it at this time.

#### CLOSING

Thank you for participating in this study for my doctoral dissertation. I appreciate your cooperation and look forward to learning from this process and helping our district and others improve our processes for decision making in the future.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Informed Consent Form**

## **INFORMED CONSENT and AUTHORIZATION FORM**

**What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?**

Principal Investigator: Leigh Anne Taylor Knight Faculty Supervisor: Dr. George Crawford

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Department of Education Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Kansas supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided for you to decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You may refuse to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time. If you do withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this unit, the services it may provide to you, or the University of Kansas.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study is the doctoral dissertation research project of the principal investigator proposed to answer:

What were changes in the ways decisions were made in a school district's guidance and counseling program between 2000 and 2009?

With research oriented toward action and process, concepts and relationships will emerge. It will be determined whether or not they are relevant or irrelevant to the phenomenon of collaborative decision making. Relevant concepts and relationships will cluster into categories and attempts will be made to make sense of the categories in new, rather than standard ways. Eventually, a theoretical framework will evolve to explain the phenomena of how decisions are being made and how this has changed over the 10-year period. The study will help inform school personnel and policy makers in efforts to foster, strengthen, and support commitment to collaborative decision making.

### **PROCEDURES**

You will be asked to voluntarily participate in an interview with the principal investigator. Interviews will be scheduled for the convenience of the participant. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately one hour or less.

You will indicate your agreement to participate by responding in writing to an initial request via email or you will respond verbally to a request via telephone. You will subsequently be provided two copies of this informed consent form, one of which is to be signed and returned to the principal investigator, and the other to be kept by you for your records.

The records will be maintained exclusively by the principal investigator. In the dissertation that is produced, coded study numbers or pseudonyms will be used and identifying details (eg. school, race) will be precluded.

As a participant, you will be identified during data collection, but not in data reporting. Your identity will be removed in the process of data analysis and compilation of the dissertation. The data are to be coded for themes and key quotations, but there will be no link between names and codes.



Your interview will be recorded and then transcribed for use in the study. The transcriptions of interviews will be kept for three years. The records will be stored at the home office of the principal investigator in the form of password protected electronic files in a locked file cabinet. The principal investigator is the only person who will have access to the records/data.

The results of this study will be reported in a doctoral dissertation. Data will be reported in a written summary and in a table of key quotations and themes. When and if names are necessary, pseudonyms will be used. Data will be presented in a format that precludes identification of individuals, school, school district, location, gender, race and other identifiable characteristics.

You will be given the option of reviewing the transcript of your interview. You will also be given the opportunity to clarify any statements made should you feel the need to do so after the interview has occurred and you have reviewed the transcripts.

## **RISKS**

There are no known risks to participants.

## **BENEFITS**

The benefit of this research for you is the opportunity to help school leaders understand, foster, and strengthen collaborative decision making. The overall benefit is for school leaders, administrators, and policy makers to better understand collaborative decision making in order to help their efforts to foster, strengthen, and support collaborative decision making.

## **PAYMENT TO PARTICIPANTS**

There will be no payments made to the participants.

## **PARTICIPANT CONFIDENTIALITY**

Your name will not be associated in any way with the information collected about you or with the research findings from this study. The researchers will use a study number or a pseudonym instead of your name. The researchers will not share information about you unless required by law or unless you give written permission.

Permission granted on this date to use and disclose your information remains in effect for one calendar year. By signing this form you give permission for the use and disclosure of your information for purposes of this study for one year.

## **REFUSAL TO SIGN CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You are not required to sign this Consent and Authorization form and you may refuse to do so without affecting your right to any services you are receiving or may receive from the University of Kansas or to participate in any programs or events of the University of Kansas. However, if you refuse to sign, you cannot participate in this study.

## **CANCELLING THIS CONSENT AND AUTHORIZATION**

You may withdraw your consent to participate in this study at any time. You also have the right to cancel your permission to use and disclose information collected about you, in writing, at any time, by sending your written request to: Leigh Anne Taylor Knight, 9705 Sunset Circle, Lenexa, Kansas, 66220. If you cancel permission to use your information, the researchers will stop

collecting additional information about you. However, the research team may use and disclose information that was gathered before they received your cancellation, as described above.

#### QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION

Questions about procedures should be directed to the researcher(s) listed at the end of this consent form.

#### PARTICIPANT CERTIFICATION:

I have read this Consent and Authorization form. I have had the opportunity to ask, and I have received answers to, any questions I had regarding the study. I understand that if I have any additional questions about my rights as a research participant, I may call (785) 864-7429 or (785) 864-7385 or write the Human Subjects Committee Lawrence Campus (HSCL), University of Kansas, 2385 Irving Hill Road, Lawrence, Kansas 66045-7563, email [dhann@ku.edu](mailto:dhann@ku.edu) or [mdenning@ku.edu](mailto:mdenning@ku.edu).

I agree to take part in this study as a research participant. By my signature I affirm that I have received a copy of this Consent and Authorization form.

_____ Type/Print Participant's Name	_____ Date
_____ Participant's Signature	

#### Researcher Contact Information

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## **APPENDIX C**

### **Counseling Advisory Board Mission Statement**

## **Counseling Advisory Board MISSION STATEMENT**

A component of the (State Name) Comprehensive Guidance Program is an advisory council. The school-community advisory committee acts as a liaison between the school and community, and it should provide recommendations concerning the needs of students and the community. A primary duty of the committee is to advise those involved in the guidance program improvement effort. The committee is not a policy or decision-making body; rather it is a source of advice, counsel and support. It is a communication link between those involved in the guidance program improvement effort and the school and community. The committee meets throughout the transition and continues as a permanent part of the improved guidance program.

Advisory Board members should include the following:

- (District Name) Board of Education Member
- Parent
- Assistant Superintendent
- District Guidance Coordinator
- A representative of the teaching staff from elementary, middle school and high school
- Business persons
- Mental health professionals
- Elementary, middle and high school counselors
- Vocational counselor
- High school students